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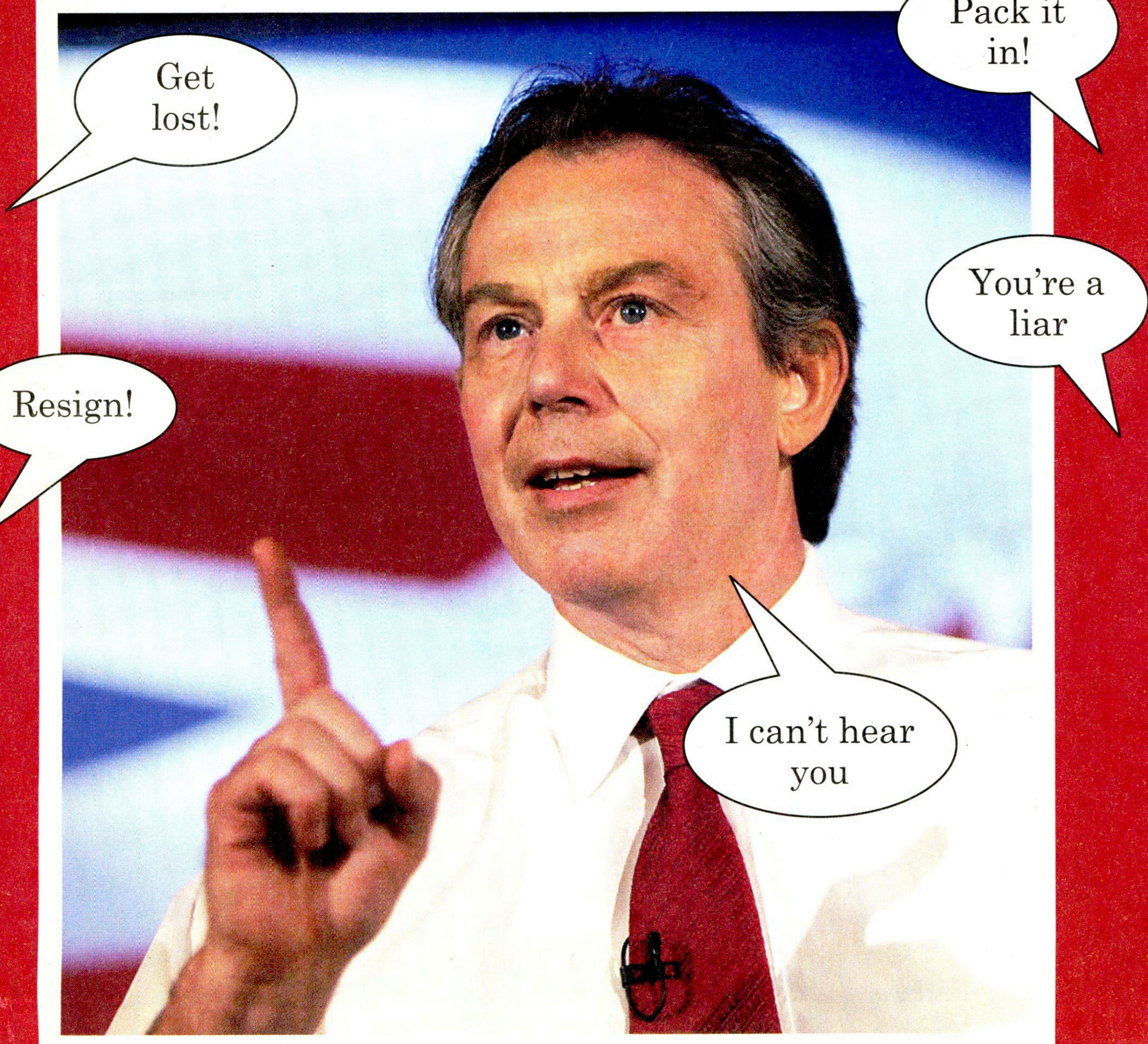

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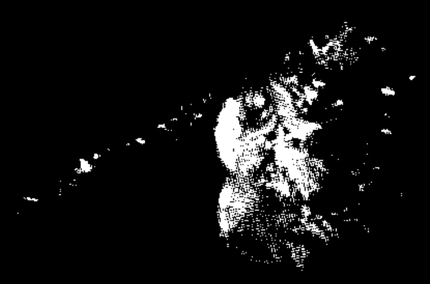

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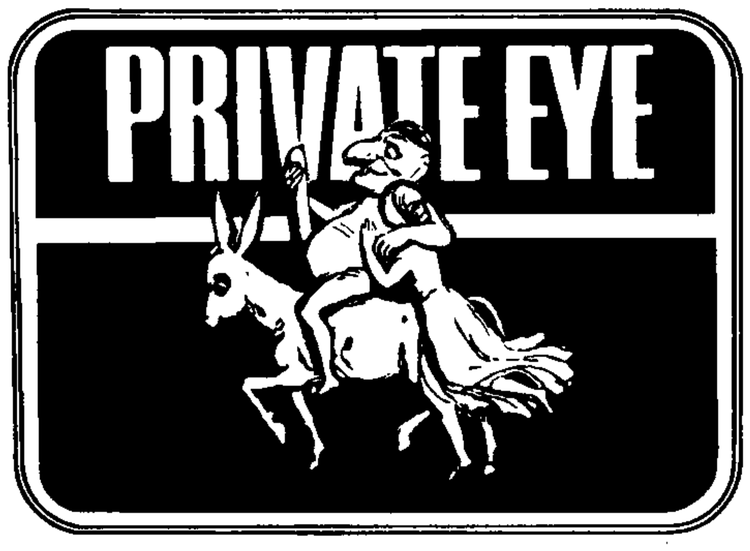

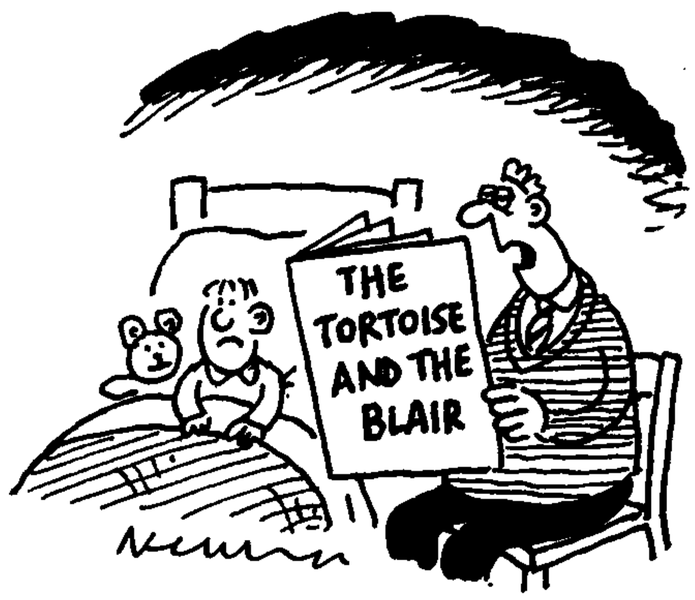

"... the Blair beat the Tortoise really easily. The end"

First past the post

- **Hackwatch on Fleet Street's crystal balls** 7
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THE brooding Chancellor is no more. Instead happy, smiling Gordon Brown is simply waiting for others in the parliamentary Labour party to do his dirty work for him.

A host of MPs, including those such as Clive Efford and John Trickett who aren't usually regarded as part of the awkward squad, have already called for Blair to go. Brown's old enemy turned new friend, Robin Cook, has also called for Blair to go sooner rather than later and is helping Brown. The betting is that Cookie will emerge as deputy leader under any Brown administration.

So unless the prime minister provides a timetable for his departure fairly quickly, he is unlikely to survive much beyond next May's local elections. While left-wingers seem likely to propose a motion calling for a leadership election in time for this September's annual party conference, the Dear Leader and his acolytes will be nervously surveying the reaction of the union barons who have it in their power to break him. In the Tory party it was the men in grey suits who trooped up to 10 Downing Street; but in "new" Labour's case it may be the "men in brown suits" who deliver the pearl-handled pistol to Mr Blair.

MEANWHILE Labour backbench rebels are being threatened with "disciplinary action" if they keep on demanding that the Dear Leader should go.

Quite what disciplinary action is open to question, since removing the whip from any number of them would further threaten the government's already reduced majority.

Cheeky backbenchers are already claiming that the cabinet contains some of the worst offending rebels, including Ruth Kelly, Charles Clarke and John Prescott – all of whom told Mr Blair where to get off when he tried either to move them or transfer some of their ministerial responsibilities…

HAS the Dear Leader been taking lessons from the other Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il of North Korea?

During the election campaign, visitors to the prime minister's Sedgefield constituency were agreed on at least one thing: there were hardly any posters of Tony Blair on display in windows, billboards or hanging from lampposts.

Miraculously, on the eve of polling day, vast numbers of posters depicting Britain's very own Dear Leader then suddenly appeared along the route that Blair and assorted hacks would take the following morning from the PM's house in Trimdon colliery to the polling station.

Overnight, it seems, hordes of party workers had been drafted in to give the impression that our own Dear Leader was just as popular as that other Dear Leader in Pyongyang…

JOHN PRESCOTT pronounced himself "particularly delighted to welcome David Miliband" as a second cabinet minister in the office of the deputy prime minister (ODPM) – as well he might be, having fought off the prime minister's initial intention to plonk Alan Milburn or David Blunkett in the middle of his empire, which would have diluted his power even further.

Number 10 maintains that this "strengthening of the ministerial team" will "allow the DPM to play a wider role on cross-departmental issues" and "chair a number of senior cabinet committees" (presumably auditing the paperclips to see whether John Birt or Andrew Adonis uses more). But in a moment of rare honesty the prime minister has also formalised Prescott's real role – keeping Old Labour happy. He will, Downing Street announces, "have a formal role in promoting the interests of the north across government".

WELSH secretary Peter Hain's additional new job as Northern Ireland secretary won't deflect criticism of the shambles that was election night in the principality.

Labour's safest seat in Wales, Blaenau Gwent, was captured by independent Labour candidate Peter Law with an astonishing 9,000 majority. This overturned a 19,000 Labour majority and defeat came despite Hain's best efforts to shore up the official "new" Labour candidate, Maggie Jones.

This emblematic constituency (see *Eyes passim*) – once represented by Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot – had an all "wimmin" shortlist of candidates foisted on it in order to keep Peter Law out and ensure a safe berth for former Unison official and ultra Blairite, Maggie Jones. As panic set in, Hain – or Vain as he is known in the valleys – ordered Welsh Labour MPs to "get over to Blaenau Gwent", and when one refused he threatened to "report him" to the party.

A succession of cabinet heavyweights were also drafted in, including David Blunkett, who told Law that he had made his point and should now "stand down" in favour of Jones. Bemused locals, who haven't seen a cabinet member in decades, even received a letter from Gordon Brown urging them to vote against Law. They also received a "new" Labour flyer hilariously carrying a picture of Aneurin Bevan, while veteran left-winger Tony Benn was drafted in to speak at a hastily convened and sparsely attended May Day "Rally in the Valley" in Brynmawr.

Law, who also represents the area in the Welsh Assembly, had re-entered the race despite undergoing major surgery for a brain tumour. His victory against the "new" Labour machine was particularly remarkable given that he was only able to campaign for two and half weeks and was unable to knock on doors.

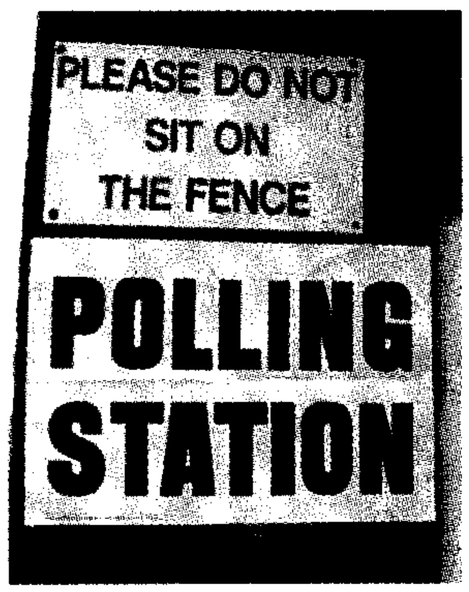
Within Labour, however, anger has now turned to fury with the knowledge that valuable resources and people were devoted to help the hapless Maggie Jones from neighbouring Monmouth – a Labour marginal that fell to the Tories on election night.

"HOORAY! We all lost!"

DAVID BLUNKETT, returning to the cabinet after the prime minister graciously allowed him some time off to "physically and emotionally restore myself", could not have been given a more appropriate job.

As head of the department for work and pensions, he will be in charge of the "no off-limits" reform of incapacity benefit which is aimed at "removing disincentives" for disabled people to return to work.

Presumably this would include perks like, er, subsidised housing at the public expense. It also makes him the new boss of… the Child Support Agency!



I-SPY

Plaistow

Submitted by Kevin Wilson.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

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ABC

Street of Shame

"IS IT to be business as usual for [Blair] and for his press tormentors?" wondered Roy Greenslade in Monday's *Grauniad*. "It will never be glad confident morning again for him, said the *Daily Mail*. The ghosts of Iraq will haunt him forever, suggested the *Daily Express*. No change from those Tory twins, then..."

While speculating on whether the *Sun* and *Times* will now drift away from Labour, Greenslade failed to mention a far more astonishing change of allegiance in the media: the defection of a hack who has long been Tony Blair's staunchest defender against salvoes from Fleet Street, and one of Alastair Campbell's most reliable mouthpieces. On the eve of polling day this hitherto loyal hack wrote a rant in the *Grauniad* explaining why he couldn't vote Labour as long as Blair is party leader. "I cannot bring myself to vote for a criminal."

It was, of course, Roy Greenslade.

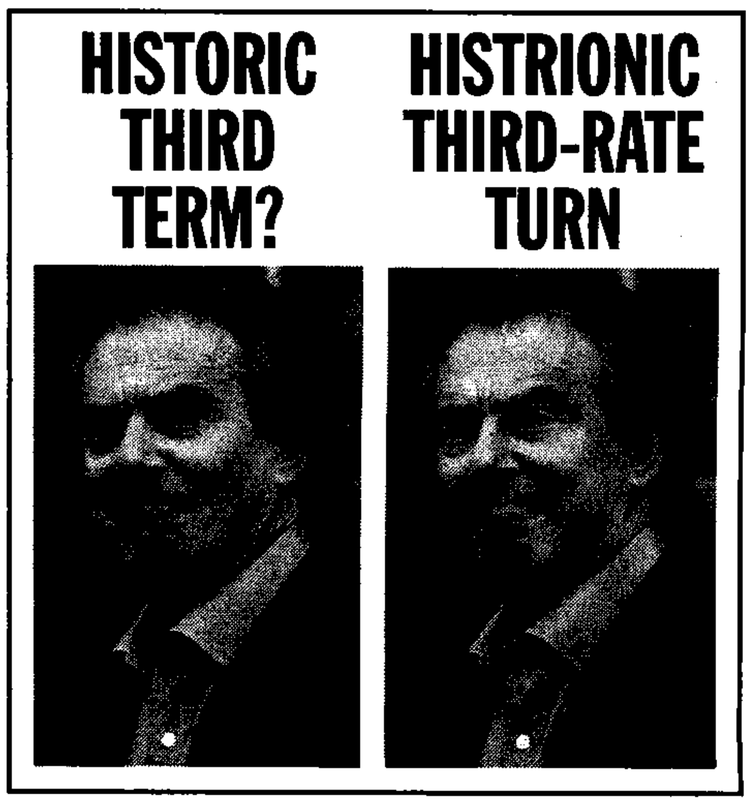
IN A pre-election interview with the *Evening Standard* last week, Sir David Frost was his usual modest self. "I've interviewed the last seven prime ministers here and six presidents in the States," he told hackette Lucy Cavendish.

Sadly, it seems they are all blending into one in his mind. "I was there when Wilson lost in 1979," he went on. "He set off to 10 Downing Street as the Prime Minister and by the time he got there he was out of power. There we were, sitting in his office, with removal men putting dust sheet over everything. That's how quick it is!"

Rather slow, in fact, given that Wilson had resigned and moved out of Downing Street three years earlier, in 1976. The defeated incumbent in 1979 – who may or may not have asked Sir David round to help him pack the china – was the late James Callaghan.

WHEN is a black man not a black man? When Yasmin Alibhai-Brown does not approve of him.

In her *Independent* column of 9 May, she revealed that "the election ushers in the first 'black' Tory MP, Adam Afriye (half Ghanian and half English) and Shailash Vara, the Ugandan Asian who has done time as deputy chairman for a party which has always repudiated equality and diversity policies... The victors deserve to be despised by egalitarians and people who believe in human rights, just as Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice are by millions of Americans of colour."



JUST FANCY THAT!

"ELECTION 2005: LEADER'S REPRIEVE – Labour's collapse allows Howard to fight another day.

Michael Howard came into his Folkestone count this morning with the smile of a man reprieved from political death, if perhaps only by a hung jury. Yesterday afternoon, the obituaries had been set in type. The rivals were circling. The sketchwriters were already preparing amusing pieces involving an early morning departure from the nearby ferry terminal. But, after the roller-coaster night of Election 2005, it is perhaps now even possible that Mr Howard can outlast Tony Blair as a party leader."

– Page nine, *Evening Standard*, 6 May, first edition.

"ELECTION 2005: LEADER RESIGNS – I didn't deliver enough so I must go...

Yesterday afternoon the obituaries had been set in type. The rivals were circling. The sketchwriters were already preparing amusing pieces..."

– Page nine, *Evening Standard*, 6 May, last edition.

THE word "redundant" is defined by *Chambers' Dictionary* as "superfluous... no longer needed and therefore dismissed". But it transpires that the 90 hacks recently made redundant by the *Telegraph*'s new bosses weren't quite so unneeded after all.

Take the case of sailing correspondent Tim Jeffery, who left in March. Clearly the paper still had to cover yachtie affairs, especially with the new public interest stimulated by Ellen Macarthur, and on 8 April it duly ran a report on the Admiral's Cup by one Ernest Gardner. Who he? Tim Jeffery – hiding behind a pseudonym because, under the terms of their "redundancy package", former *Torygraph* hacks aren't allowed to freelance for the paper until a month after their departure.

With his purdah over (and his redundancy cheque safely banked), the allegedly superfluous Jeffery is now back writing under his own name.

Another old *Telegraph* hand, defence correspondent Michael Smith, is also sorely needed. Thanks to his excellent Whitehall sources, Smith had the biggest scoop of the election campaign with the top-secret document revealing that Blair had privately committed Britain to war against Iraq as early as July 2002. It could have been all over the front page of the *Telegraph* – had the paper not paid Smith off two months ago, thus allowing him to flog the story for a huge fee to the *Sunday Times*.

WAYNE ROONEY has been axed from a children's football tournament because the sponsors, Coca-Cola, apparently think him an unsuitable role model. Who better to rush to young Wayne's defence than that paragon of rectitude, Piers "Morgan" Moron?

"I think, on balance, I would rather have the greatest footballing talent this country's produced in decades as a role model for young players than Coke, a fizzy drink that turns every kid I know into a crazed maniac, while rotting their teeth," he wrote in the *Evening Standard* last week.

Piers hasn't always been so averse to yuksome fizzy colas. In April 1996 he turned the *Daily Mirror*'s pages and masthead blue for a day to promote the launch of blue-themed Pepsi-Cola, and gave every *Mirror* reader a free can of the sickly concoction. "The *Daily Mirror* and Pepsi-Cola are two of the most famous brand names in the country," he raved, "and I am delighted that we have teamed up for what is without doubt the biggest and most exciting promotion in newspaper history."

The nation's dentists and behavioural psychologists have been grappling with the consequences ever since.

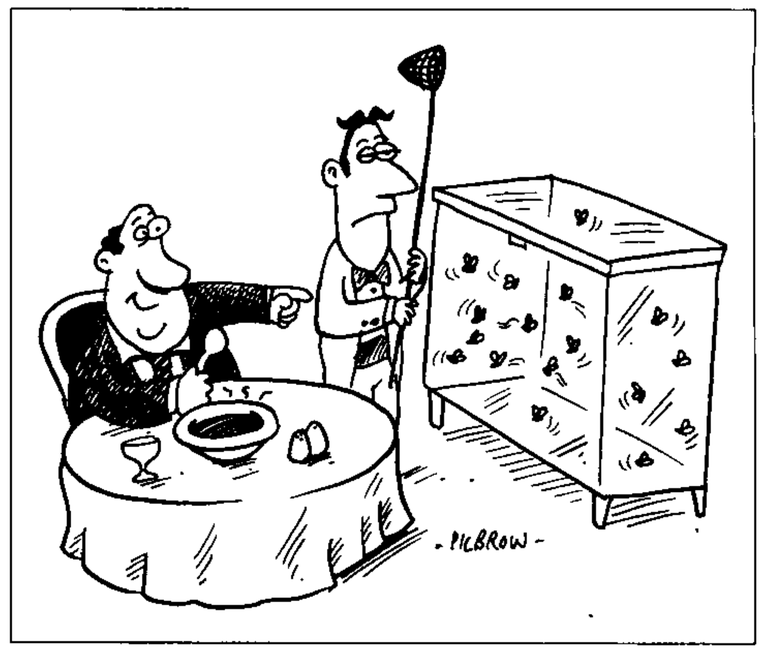
HAVING lost her mother and stepfather in the Asian Tsunami, Charlie Dimmock has now lost her TV career as well with the scrapping of *Ground Force*.

One paper which might have been expected to offer its condolences was the *Daily Mail*. It has puffed her relentlessly over the years under headlines such as "Flowering of Charlie" and "Blooming Brilliant Charlie", and she has happily repaid the compliments. In July 2003 she wrote a 1,400-word feature about the Hampton Court Flower Show (sponsored by the *Daily Mail*), singling out as her favourite top exhibit the "*Daily Mail* Woodland Pavilion... an incredible experience". She also happens to be the gardening correspondent for the *Mail on Sunday*.

So, inevitably, the *Daily Mail* marked her latest setback with... a full-page hatchet-job by David "Phil Space" Thomas. "Cynics might claim it's no surprise Dimmock is struggling to find work," he wrote. "The surprise is that she ever became famous in the first place. After all, Charlie Dimmock has no great talent."

Thomas wisely avoided mentioning her recent double bereavement, which might prompt even *Mail* readers to feel a flicker of sympathy. Dimmock was "the micro-celebrity whose time ran out", and it served her right for picking up the "poisoned chalice of fame" instead of being content with working in a gardening centre. "Her story is a thoroughly modern morality tale," he opined. "The TV machine that made her famous, along with so many other instant 'stars', has now spat her out."

As, it seems, has the *Daily Mail*.



"GIVE the Dame a Break", pleaded an editorial in the *Guardian*'s business section on 29 April, as Pearson CEO Dame Marjorie Scardino prepared for her company's annual meeting.

The un-bylined piece ridiculed suggestions that Scardino had failed to make good on her promises when she took the job in 1997, poured cold water on speculation that the company would be forced to sell the *Financial Times*, and flatly refused to countenance the thought that her £1.5m pay packet was in any way excessive: "This is the same woman who has been popping up in pay surveys in previous years as the standout example of how female executives are underpaid when measured against their male peers...

"Scardino will rise this morning to face what promises to be one of her more difficult days," the paper mused. Something the paper omitted to mention, however, was that she would be doing so alongside her husband Albert Scardino, executive editor of... the *Guardian*.

***EYE* 1128 reported the bizarre choice by the *Financial Times* of Axa – veteran mis-seller of pensions and other financial products – to join the paper in running a competition asking readers to set out a "manifesto" addressing the country's pension problems.**

The two winners have now been announced and, unsurprisingly, both proposed taxpayer subsidies to encourage even more people to save in private pension schemes of the sort sold for a suitable fee by, er, Axa.

HACKWATCH

Those Experts in Full

MUCH comment has assumed that it is impossible for the Conservatives to win the next general election. The truth is that it is unlikely, but not impossible. It is entirely possible that Labour will lose its overall majority... One should turn one's attention to Stephen Twigg, the 1997 victor of Enfield Southgate, Michael Portillo's old seat. He had a majority of 5,546 in the 2001 general election... If Mr Twigg loses his seat, Labour may cease to have an overall majority." – the *Times*, 3 November 2003.

"A few months ago I suggested that the most probable outcome of the election was a minority Labour government. The events of the past few days have, if anything, strengthened this judgement or, if you prefer, this guess. Remember, you read it here first." – **Alan Watkins**, *Independent on Sunday*, 13 June 2004.

"The wisdom of the wise is, I know, that Labour will go on to win the next election whatever happens. I am not so sure. There is the possibility either of a complete loss of office or of a continuation of Labour rule by a minority government." – **Alan Watkins**, *Independent on Sunday*, 4 July 2004.

"There are 659 MPs. But 13 Scottish seats are to disappear... with the consequence that we are looking at 324 MPs rather than the present 330 needed for an absolute majority. Several months ago now I predicted that Mr Blair would not manage it. It was then a minority view. Since then several others have climbed aboard..." – **Alan Watkins**, *Independent on Sunday*, 26 September 2004.

"I am still less than sure that Bush will win re-election, but I do see the possibility that Iraq will re-elect Bush but defeat Blair. Last June's local government elections put the Conservatives first with 38 percent, the Liberal Democrats second with 30 percent and Labour third with 28 percent. If the next election is fought on the issue of Iraq, might not Labour come third again?" – **William Rees-Mogg**, *Mail on Sunday*, 24 October 2004.

"There is a broad public consensus that the Labour Party, under Tony Blair, will win a third victory, as Margaret Thatcher won her third victory in 1987. Most people expect that... Yet the history of elections leaves the issue open... The historic record shows it is quite possible that Labour will lose office, even if that would come as a surprise." – **William Rees-Mogg**, *Mail on Sunday*, 28 November 2004.

"There are five great offices of state which, between them, dominate Westminster and Whitehall. They are Downing Street, the Treasury, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office and Defence. At present, five months before a general election, the structure is a shambles. This makes it difficult to be governed; it will also make it difficult for the Labour Party to win the general election, however far ahead it may be in the opinion polls." – **William Rees-Mogg**, the *Times*, 6 December 2004.

"Most commentators are so fixated with the inevitability of another Labour victory, even another Labour landslide, that they have not noticed that three-quarters of the electorate think it is time for a change... If 73 percent of all voters do decide to vote for the Opposition party of their choice, they will in fact get a 'change of direction'. Tony Blair will lose his majority, though he might be able to persuade the Liberal Democrats to keep him in under some Lib-Lab pact." – **William Rees-Mogg**, the *Times*, 16 January 2005.

"In both of the past two general elections the fall in the Labour lead can be accounted for by two factors: unexpectedly low turnout and gains by the Lib Dems... In 2005 this effect is likely to be enhanced by resentment over the Iraq war. If one adjusts the current opinion polls to anticipate similar movements of opinion during the next election campaign, one gets very worrying figures for Labour. The outcome would be Labour 29%, Conservatives 33, Liberal Democrats 27... That would probably produce a Labour overall majority of around zero, or possibly below." – **William Rees-Mogg**, the *Times*, 7 February.

"Much is still unclear about this election. At the moment, I would only predict that the Tories will get something between 200 and 300 seats... It is not inconceivable that there could be a hung parliament." – **Bruce Anderson**, *Independent*, 28 February.

"Labour enters the general election with the same heavy armour and powerful artillery that served it so well in 1997 and 2001, yet finds itself floundering. Of course, Labour could substantially improve its chances of winning by postponing the poll so that it could replace Mr Blair with Mr Brown. But this won't happen. That is why the most likely outcome of the 2005 election is, as in 1974, a hung parliament." – **Andreas Whittam Smith**, *Independent*, 21 March.

"When this newspaper gave its support to the Conservative Party a year ago many media commentators claimed we were wrong to back a loser. As recently as Christmas, low morale did indeed grip the Tories as swing voters seemed impervious to their message... [But] the Tories seem to be inching ahead. Because of Mr Blair's 161-seat majority and the electoral system's current bias against the Conservatives, for Mr Howard to win a Commons majority would be a sensational feat. But the momentum is with him now and it is possible he could do so." – **Patrick O'Flynn**, *Daily Express* political editor, 6 April.

"It's so long since we had a proper hung parliament – springing from the result of an election – that most people will have forgotten what it entails. They need to be reminded, for the most recent polls suggest that it could very well be the outcome on 5 May." – **W.F. Deedes**, *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April.

"Prime Minister Tony Blair could win on a technicality – the increasing bias of the electoral system against the Tories – leading to a minority Labour government, constitutional uproar and parliamentary instability." – **Fraser Nelson**, *The Business*, 10 April.

"At lunchtime on Saturday 7 May it is possible that a meeting with far-reaching consequences could be taking place somewhere in central Scotland. Gordon Brown, leader-presumptive of the Labour Party, could be pouring a glass of Scotch for Charles Kennedy, and discussing terms for their coalition. The notion, or threat, is not so far fetched as it might seem... Many would-be Tory voters in Labour-held constituencies will vote Lib Dem if that candidate stands the best chance of winning. Coupled with the rise in Tory fortunes, this means that the hung parliament scenario is increasingly possible." – **Simon Heffer**, *Daily Mail*, 15 April.

"Michael Howard's Tories are heading for a crushing defeat in the general election – with Premier Tony Blair set for a landslide victory... Tony Blair is on course for a massive 152-SEAT majority when the nation votes on 5 May, only slightly less than his 165-seat lead in 2001." – **Ian Kirby**, *News of the World* political editor, 17 April.

"Other carefully planned moves, according to Mr Blair's closest confidants, include promoting John Reid, the health secretary, to foreign secretary in place of Jack Straw. Mr Straw is likely to be demoted but to remain in the Cabinet. Alan Milburn... is likely to be rewarded with the post of trade and industry secretary... Tessa Jowell, the culture secretary, is Mr Blair's choice to replace Mr Reid at the department of health... Geoff Hoon, the defence secretary, has indicated his wish to leave the government. His job is likely to be filled by Alistair Darling..." – Front-page scoop by **Melissa Kite and Patrick Hennessy**, *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 May.

"It is likely that the Tories will be able to claim some success on Friday by cutting Tony Blair's majority and Mr Howard will not resign in the aftermath of a defeat, as did his predecessor, William Hague, who announced that he was quitting the day after the 2001 election." – **Colin Brown**, *Independent*, 3 May.

"I cannot go along with the view, held by so many professional political journalists, that the opinion polls are right and that the Blair government is set for a 50-100 majority... My gut tells me that on the morning of 6 May we will see some oddly contradictory results, and I would suggest that we could be facing a hung parliament." – **Mo Mowlam**, *Independent*, 4 May.

"Labour will get a 100-plus majority, Tony Blair will stay for most of the next Parliament. Michael Howard will not resign immediately." – **Alice Miles**, the *Times*, 5 May.

"If the polls are still undercounting Conservative support, the Tories probably have a lead of between 5 and 10 per cent in a real election." – **William Rees-Mogg**, the *Times*, 5 May.

"Labour is heading for a historic third-term victory over the Conservatives with a possible three-figure majority..." – **Alan Travis and Patrick Wintour**, *Guardian*, 5 May.

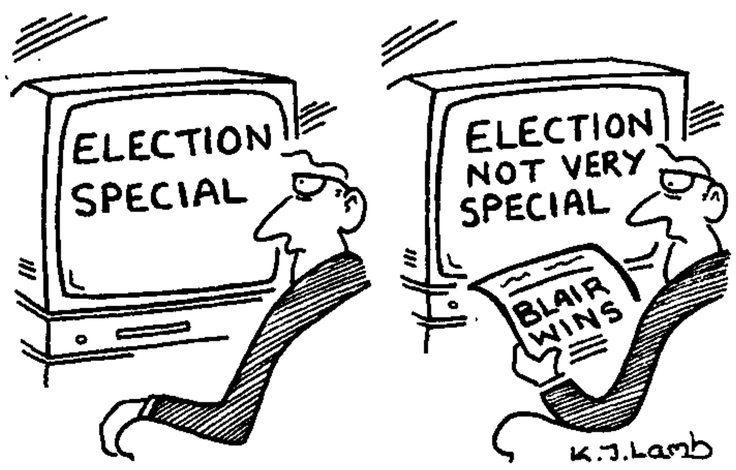
"Lib Dems [will] take five more seats than any other party." – **Adam Hart Davis**, *Guardian*, 5 May.

"I asked the spirit guides and then used automatic writing. The polls are flawed. Blair will be voted out. The Labour party will lose and a May miracle will occur. The Conservatives will return a government with a three-seat majority. Howard is our next prime minister. He will team up with Ukip and the Ulster Unionists. The smaller parties will become important. Kilroy-Silk will win a seat... The Liberal Democrats will gain seven seats. In four months' time the Liberal Democrats will choose a new leader and Kennedy will return to the backbenches." – Polling-day prediction by Camilla Ventham Fraser, spiritual medium, *Guardian*, 5 May. Were her "spirit guides" by any chance related to those of Mystic Mogg?

Number crunchings

67 ■ Labour majority which Daily Mail says is "devastated" after voters "give Blair a bloody nose"

21 ■ Conservative majority in 1992 which Daily Mail said was "comfortable" after "famous victory"



Number crunchings

7.8m ■ TV viewers who stayed up to watch result of Embassy snooker world championship last week

6.8m ■ TV viewers who stayed up to watch result of election last week

SO THE country voted for Blair and can look forward to Brown. But who will Britain get along with Gordon?

Last month he picked two wealthy businessmen to help him run the economy – even though they both run firms that are doing their damnedest to avoid paying tax.

On 5 April the chancellor appointed Marks & Spencer chairman Paul Myners and Vodafone chief executive Arun Sarin to the court of the Bank of England.

M&S is one of the firms fighting a court case to claw back tax by claiming losses in European subidies against UK profits. While M&S could win £30m, the treasury will lose billions as other firms follow its lead (see last *Eye*).

Sarin's Vodafone, meanwhile, is one of the firms that bought expensive licences from the treasury to run 3G mobile phone services. Vodafone's share of the £3bn paid helped Brown balance his books. But faced by sluggish sales, Vodafone and others immediately then went to court to try to get some of the cash back, saying they were entitled to a VAT rebate of hundreds of millions of pounds.

The treasury said this was nonsense as it does not charge VAT, but the phone firms have taken Brown to the European court of justice, claiming that by running the 3G auction the government was "conducting a telecommunications business".

Sarin's Vodafone has form on VAT. Last April Customs closed down a scheme whereby it sold top-up cards to itself through an Irish subsidiary to avoid £15m of VAT.

The remit at the Bank of England is essentially governance, and here Myners has form. He of course was chairman of the fund management company Gartmore when it was involved in the split capital trust scandal (see *Eyes passim*).

WHEN education secretary Ruth Kelly promised new nutritional standards for school caterers following Jamie Oliver's intervention, a group of parents in Merton pointed out to the *Guardian* that their kids might not benefit as, under a 25-year PFI deal with WS Atkins to run schools in the borough, the meals contract had already been sub-contracted to turkey twizzler specialists Scolarest.

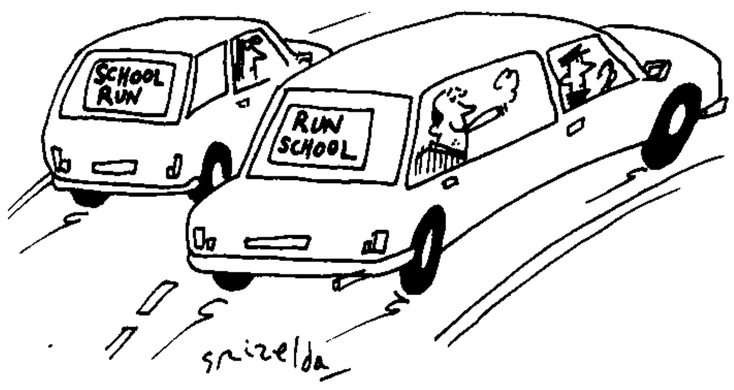
Although Merton council leader Andrew Judge quickly wrote to the paper to defend the catering, he didn't deny that long-term catering contracts would trump government standards. And should Merton's parents insist on any changes, they ought to know what they are up against in WS Atkins.

The company is most notorious for its performance in Southwark, where in 2001 it won a five-year contract to run the borough's schools. Two years into the deal, with the schools no better, no sign of profits from the deal, the company's share price at rock bottom and the borough refusing to buy more services under the PFI deal, Atkins simply pulled out, leaving the council to pick up the pieces.

MORE ON Greg Hands, the law 'n' order zealot who is now Tory MP for Hammersmith and Fulham.

Our report on his fire-starting adventures at a Fenland pub (see last *Eye*) elicited a torrent of reminiscence from alumni of Robinson College, Cambridge. The recurring theme is his great appetite for booze and, er, setting light to things.

These habits did nothing to stop his ascent in the Cambridge University Conservative Association, aided by a young henchman who, like Hands, had a zero-tolerance attitude to dissent. "Once I saw a dissident barrelling down the staircase *on fire*," recalls a contemporary. "Greg and his friend were standing at the top of the stairs, grinning. The friend was holding an aerosol and a cigarette lighter. It transpired that they regularly kept meetings in order by using this homemade flamethrower." (Lord Gnome would, of course, welcome details of any other fire-related events.)



Number crunchings

10 MONTHS Time necessary to spend out of government for misleading register of members' interests and building society (Peter Mandelson)

5 MONTHS Time necessary to spend out of government for misleading official inquiry (David Blunkett)

0 MONTHS Time necessary to spend out of government for misleading country about reasons for going to war (Tony Blair)

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THERE was much excitement in the European parliament last month when it was revealed that Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, had last summer been a guest on the luxury yacht of the Greek billionaire businessman Spiro Latsis, named by the *Forbes* Rich List as the world's 79th richest man.

Despite questioning by an MEP, Barroso had previously refused to admit to his holiday on the grounds that Mr Latsis's hospitality (estimated value: 20,000 euros) was not an "interest" he needed to declare. In this he was supported by his fellow commissioners, when they discussed the matter; and it was only when news of his freebie was leaked to the media by angry commission officials that he finally confessed to it.

Barroso explained he had only spent six days on Latsis's yacht because they were old friends since student days, and the commission's chief spokesperson emphasised that Mr Latsis had no business links whatever with the EU. Various newspapers in Germany, Britain and Greece then got on to the story, uncovering various links between the EU and Latsis's business empire, one of which was that, between 1999 and 2004, Latsis's banking group had been the sole channel for EU funding to Greece, confirmed by the commission as totalling 28 billion euros.

But the *Times* and the *Sunday Telegraph* also attempted to link Latsis to the scandal over the new 2.3 billion euro Athens airport, which benefited from more than 1bn euro in EU funding. When Latsis's London lawyers came down hard, corrections had to be published, insisting not only that was there no connection between Latsis and the contract for building the airport, but that the Latsis group had no other links to the EU apart from the banking contract.

What the lawyers were obviously not told, however, was the story of the Lamda Shipyard, in which the Latsis group has a significant interest, and which in 2003 applied to the Greek government for a 10,349,269 euro subsidy. As "state aid", this required permission from the EU's competition commissioner, Mario Monti. For some reason the application ran into problems with Brussels, which last June necessitated a meeting between the shipyard company and the commission, followed by further correspondence with the Greek government.

In August, while this matter was still unresolved, Mr Barroso, the commission's president-elect, enjoyed his holiday on Mr Latsis's yacht. On 22 September, as can be seen from the internet, commissioner Monti gave the subsidy his approval. There is of course not the slightest hint of a connection between these two events. But they do again raise the question of whether the commission was right to claim that there was no business link between Latsis companies and the EU. Should Barroso not have been made aware that it might be a good idea to declare his holiday, if only to underline that it was totally above board?

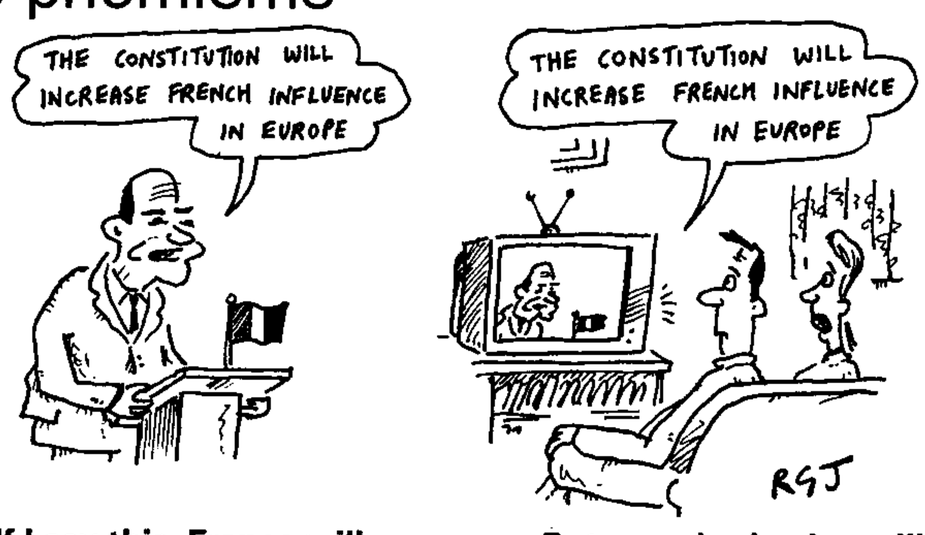
It might also seem appropriate that the Lamda Shipyard, subsidised by Greek taxpayers with the permission of the EU, specialises in building and refitting luxury yachts of the type loved and owned by billionaires. Whether this is an appropriate way to spend public money is of course of no concern to anyone who is not a Greek taxpayer.

IS Marta Andreasen, the EU whistleblower who was suing the European Commission for wrongful dismissal (see *Eyes passim*), the latest victim of the European Union's cult of silence in its battle to stifle dissent?

Mrs Andreasen, the former senior accounting officer who was suspended after declaring that the EU's accounting system for its 70 billion euro annual budget was like a bank with the vault door open, had four cases against the commission. The *Eye* has now learnt that she has withdrawn the last two of these. At the same time, she is no longer responding to telephone calls to her residence in Barcelona and nor is she answering emails.

In Brussels the speculation is that Mrs Andreasen might have reached some kind of settlement with the commission which forbids her from continuing to speak to the press.

EU-phemisms


THE CONSTITUTION WILL INCREASE FRENCH INFLUENCE IN EUROPE
THE CONSTITUTION WILL INCREASE FRENCH INFLUENCE IN EUROPE
RGJ

If I say this, France will vote for it

But everybody else will vote against

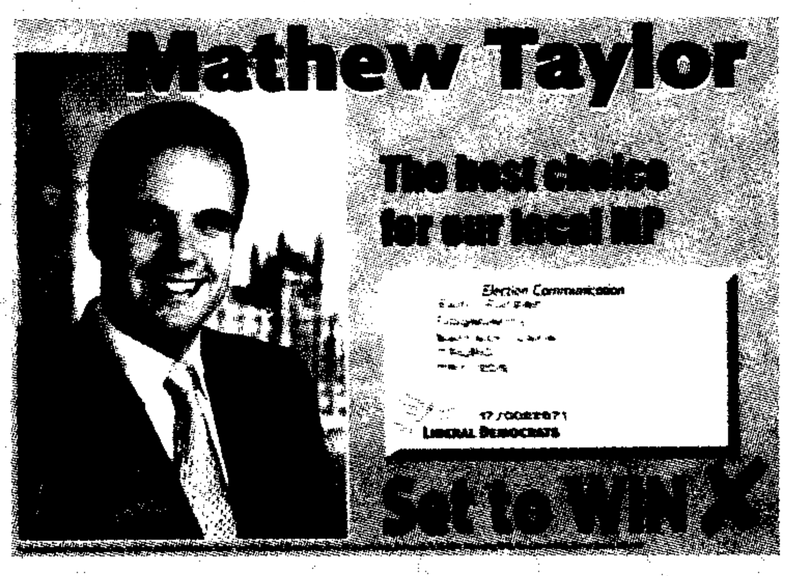
Electionballs

TOO many ballot papers? Too few? Someone else's ballot papers? Eye readers across Britain have contacted us to report cock-ups in the postal voting system.

Students who found themselves registered to vote in more than one constituency reported in from **Durham University, Glasgow School of Art, Oxford University** and **Liverpool University**.

Voters who received more than one chance to express their views due to a surfeit of postal forms wrote in from **Keighley, Croydon South, Arundel & South Downs** and **North West Durham**, where there were also reports of people getting the wrong polling cards delivered. In the Macclesfield and Tatton constituencies, voters who were known to have been sent two postal forms were warned to only use one.

LIB DEM Matthew Taylor made much of the fact that he went to school in the **Truro and St Austell** constituency, which he held on to. What a pity he didn't learn to spell his own name there.



JOHN ROBERTSON was returned as Labour MP for **Glasgow North West**, where people were obviously impressed that "spending on education has went up 52%". Is any of that spending on remedial grammar classes?

"SAY NO to unlimited immigration" demanded UKIP's election leaflets. However, its own candidate biographies suggested they wouldn't want such limits being applied to the candidates themselves. In **Winchester** David Abbot noted: "I practised medicine in America for 25 years" while **Ludlow** candidate Michael Zuckerman "qualified as an attorney in California in 1993".

"YOU can be assured that if I am elected as the MP for **Erewash**, I will put pressure on yourself and the Home Secretary to ensure there will be zero tolerance of crime in Erewash – and that I will not be prepared to accept offender-oriented policing," thundered Robert Kilroy-Silk in a magisterial letter to the chief constable of Derbyshire.

What had aroused the orange one's ire? The police decision not to prosecute the perpetrator of what Kilroy called a "deliberate, premeditated and cowardly attack by an adult man who should have known better" while he was being interviewed by a European TV crew outside a local supermarket.

Accounts do differ, however, as to what exactly happened on 16 April. Kilroy told police he was subjected to a "violent attack" in which a passer by "smashed a bottle of water against the side of my head", something which "could have caused serious injury" (as it was, he told the local paper it left him with a "red mark on his head"). The assailant, however, claims he did nothing more than squirt Kilroy with water from a plastic bottle before running away – which, curiously, is exactly what the TV crew which was interviewing Kilroy at the time captured on film.

Perhaps, like the mindset of Derbyshire police, their footage has been cleverly doctored to be "more concerned about the welfare of the offender than the interests of the victim".

OXFORD EAST Green Party candidate Jacob Sanders discovered a whole new threat to the environment.

- **Our streets are crowded with cars and air pollution rockets.**

THE BNP's candidate for **Huddersfield**, Karl Hanson, was suspended from the party after appearing before magistrates charged with five class A drugs offences two days before the election. It was too late to remove him from ballot papers, to the frustration of his fellows on the far right who want to reintroduce the death penalty for drug dealers. Hanson, who has not yet entered a plea to the charges, will appear at Leeds crown court later this month.

CHARITY fundraiser Geoffrey Jones was collecting donations for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution outside **Woodford** tube station early one morning in April, when former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith and his squad of election leafleteers muscled in on his spot. Mildly miffed at being asked to move so they could take the prime spot near the entrance, Mr Jones dropped a line to his local paper.

When the Woodford Guardian called the local Tory party for comment, the incident was dismissed on the grounds that Mr Jones was a "well-known local Labour party activist". That came as news to him. He has never been connected with the party and doesn't even vote Labour.

"I'VE BEEN lucky enough to work with Damon Albarn of Gorillas [sic] and Blur and also my friend June Sarpong, from TV," wrote Labour MP Nigel Griffiths to first time voters in his **Edinburgh South** constituency – no doubt leaving the youth vote utterly appalled.

His other leaflets also featured a host of celebs, such as author Ian Rankin and, bizarrely, Robin Harper, co-convenor of the Scottish Green Party. The MSP complained that the leaflet made it appear he was endorsing Griffiths – even though there was a Green candidate in the constituency.

IN NEARBY **Edinburgh West** it was Tory David Brogan who was accused of misleading voters, with his statement that he had "lived and worked in Edinburgh for many years" implying that he lived locally. In fact, he explained to the Scottish press, he has lived in London since 1998, but was planning to move to the Scottish capital "win or lose". So will he be packing boxes after being trounced by his Lib Dem rival?

LIB DEM Steve Delaney managed to close the gap on Labour MP Frank Doran in **Aberdeen North** despite telling voters that he had "campaigned on many local issues such as fighting against post offices in the city". Those post offices really are a menace to society, aren't they?

THE Labour business manifesto, launched on 28 April, a mere fortnight after the collapse of MG Rover and the announcement of an inquiry into the financial dealings of owners Phoenix Venture Holdings, featured one particularly spectacular pledge: "To introduce a new award for Phoenix Entrepreneurs to encourage positive public recognition for individuals whose first business did not succeed but who have come back, worked hard and built successful enterprises."

MANCHESTER's Lib Dem candidate Marc Ramsbottom appeared to be all ears to his constituents' problems in this picture on his election leaflet. But how did that extra body part get there? Could it possibly be that he was never really photographed in front of that police car at all, but dropped in later by computer? That would certainly explain why he's wearing the same shirt in almost every photo on the leaflet.

IT WASN'T only service people in **Iraq** who missed out on polling due to postal vote delays. There were reports of papers not reaching **Germany** – and even **Northern Ireland** – in time to vote and return.

Meanwhile instructions to many postal voters in Havant helpfully read: "Do not vote for more than two candidates."

IN **Windsor**, Adam Afriyie – now the first black Tory MP – attempted to add a touch of grandeur to his campaign by being photographed on the Long Walk outside the castle. The Crown Estate complained that its neutrality was being compromised and, via the local council, requested that he withdraw the image. Not a great start to relations with one of the most important (although non-voting) residents of his new constituency.

DURHAM City Lib Dem candidate Carol Woods was caught out filling her leaflet with gibberish in the last Electionballs. She finished off her campaign with a further show of literacy, in a letter opening: "Dear Freind."

AND IN **Brentford and Isleworth** the Labour party somehow got mixed up between its woman Ann Keen and a large building, with leaflets claiming: "the ulitmate [sic] gain from Labour, as your MP is the new West Middlesex Hospital."

TV

Uncharted Territory (BBC2)

IN his memoir of reality television, Peter "Baz" Bazalgette reveals that he refused to let the BBC even bid for the British version of *Big Brother*: he knew that the corporation's governors would block or neuter such a tabloid idea.

It was a shrewd assessment. Subsequently, the BBC networks have tended to come late and lame to reality TV. *Fame Academy* – saddled with governor-comforting insistences on proper music education and so on – reached the screen at the exact moment that ITV1's *Pop Idol* was starting to look tired. And BBC2's first attempt at the *Big Brother* format – *The Trench* - tried to make the idea seem more serious by asking the contestants to pretend to be World War I soldiers but the simulation of tragic history merely served to make the idea seem more tacky.

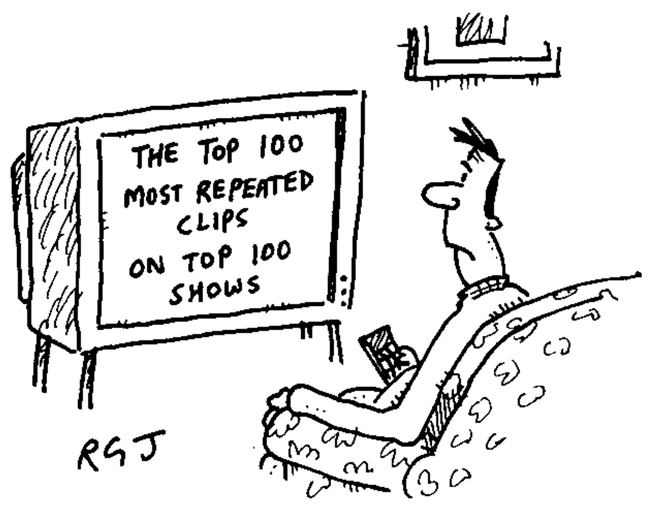
Now, at the precise moment Channel 4 viewers are openly pleading for just one programme every now and then which doesn't feature a Sloane trying to buy a second home overseas, BBC2 finally enters the field (up a muddy track somewhere with a telegenic French peasant looking on) of property television.

Uncharted Territory is so openly a copy of Channel 4 house-hunting shows such as *Relocation Relocation*, *No Turning Back* and *A Place In The Sun* that, if Paul Abbot hadn't nicked it for a drama, the series should really be called *Shameless*. The first location – Slovakia – even featured in a recent *Relocation Relocation*.

Filling the Kirsty Allsop role for the BBC is Juliet Morris, a Sue Barker-lookalike who has been absent from the screens for a while. Her co-presenter is Nigel Letts, a "property expert". Juliet is blonde and giggly; Nigel is big and gruff. Someone has falsely imagined this might make them a double-act. There are excruciating "spontaneous" exchanges between them, involving banter which seems to have been translated from Bantu. A simpering Juliet will say: "I'm just going to do some research into an ancient local tradition involving a beer glass." Nigel looks disapproving: "You're drinking, aren't you?" Juliet puts on a mock innocent look: "Me!"

Between these gruesome dialogues, Juliet and Nigel take two sisters from England who are seeking a foreign property as a "little retirement fund" to a trio of Slovakian properties: a water mill, a miner's cottage and a ski chalet. Everyone expresses amazement that they cost about as much as a second-hand car in England.

Over plates of local cuisine (including stuffed cabbage and potato pancakes), Juliet keeps



asking Nigel if he's got any advice for the sisters. Nigel suggests that they "get key local people on their side" and "don't take things at face value." He also thinks it's good news that the region has a "right-wing government that has chased growth through tax cuts."

For public service television, the basic problem with shows of this kind is that they are adverts for estate agents: most of the Channel 4 property shows link to websites on which houses can actually be traded. So we're regularly subjected to analytical interludes that make the format safe for the BBC governors.

The BBC, though, can't be caught flogging property and so, every few minutes, there's a burst of objective assessment of the region. In keeping with the larky overall tone of the programme, these segments use text spelling: Things 2 Do, Food 4 Thought, How 2 Buy. Each element of the country is given a mark out of 10. Slovakia, for example, gets 34 out of 50. So when Slav Castles R Us has a billion-pound stock market float in a few years' time, the BBC can say that it tried to put a brake on the buying fever in a way Channel 4 wouldn't.

But, though they might salve the corporate conscience, these sections merely make the programme even more tedious than its models. And so it rolls pointlessly, imitatively on. Nigel gets a bit fresh with Juliet, who replies: "Well, excuse me!" And there's a breathless voice-over by a guy who sounds just like the one who used to describe the prizes on *Sale of the Century*. "That giant watermill looks like it needs some specialist attention!" he squeaks. And: "Those cheeky Slav builders seem to have gone for a cheeky beer! Or three!"

The premise of property series is that there are remarkable bargains to be found on the market. But the message of *Uncharted Territory* is that shoddy workmanship on a low budget can't be disguised.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

BBC news pictures of Tony Blair greeting carefully selected supporters on the campaign trail routinely featured music from U2's Beautiful Day.

How odd that in some sequences viewers could see people dutifully clapping and cheering but couldn't hear them – only the music, which sounded as if it had bee added afterwards from a CD, rather than recorded naturally at the time.

So was "approved" footage delivered by Labour to news organisations, complete with pictures and U2 music locked together? Perish the thought! But this would explain the terrible jump cuts in some sequences as well as the occasional lack of natural location sound.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Our continuous coverage will continue after the break." – Sky election coverage.

ONE way the BBC has responded to culture secretary Tessa Jowell's demand for more "accountability" is by peppering almost every news bulletin with requests for letters, emails, calls, texts and video-phone messages.

Some of these are read out on air in the hope of convincing licence-payers that their views matter. But in reality nearly all these messages are binned on arrival. Only three or four might make it on air, selected by an underling to show general "balance" rather than as a representative sample of the views received.

BOB SHENNAN, controller of Radio Five Live, has told staff he wants the station to become "the most listened to radio station amongst ethnic minorities".

This won't mean extra funding for programmes that might have a broader appeal than the current mix of "blokey" news and sport. In fact, budgets even for those programmes that have actually made an effort to report ethnic stories, like the *Five Live Report*, are being cut by 15 percent.

What it will mean is more funding for a series of compulsory "diversity workshops" for everybody. Shennan's timing is unfortunate: "All staff from News and Sport will be expected to have completed the workshops over the next couple of months."

That's just three months before redundancy notices start landing on many doorsteps and staff leave the BBC, taking their newly-found awareness of "diversity" with them.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Tony Blair has won a third-term election characterised by the lack of transparency and media freedom."

– Radio news bulletin, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, 6 May.

ASK THE FAMILY
BBC
HERE'S AN EASY ONE FOR GRANNY, MUM, DAD & ALL THE KIDS ...
MORONS
NOW, WHAT HAVE DICK & DOM MANAGED TO ACHIEVE THAT WAS PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE? ...
THAT'S RIGHT!...
THEY'VE MADE ANT & DEC LOOK UPMARKET!
Ken Pyne

THE new series of *Doctor Who* has seen praise heaped on the head of Mike Tucker, the special effects supervisor responsible for bringing the Daleks back to the screen, demolishing Big Ben and crashing an alien spaceship into the Thames.

Last month the *Radio Times* rewarded him with a double-page feature on his work, and he was nominated for a BAFTA for his miniature work on the documentary *The Brighton Bomb*.

To show its appreciation, BBC resources also informed him that the unit he heads is not "financially sustainable" and that it would be closed down and he and his team would be made redundant – though they were welcome to reapply for freelance work.

EGG-ON-FACE time at Reuters, where editor-in-chief Geert Linnebank's plan to convene a 10-strong working party of senior managers to come up with ways to improve the beleaguered news agency's performance has backfired spectacularly.

Linnebank's plan came a cropper after he asked members of the working party to submit ideas for discussion by email before the group met for the first time. In response Reuters' global managing editor David Schlesinger fired off an email in which he wrote: "Our news is perceived as not having enough insight. Our data is perceived as having terrible quality problems." All points doubtless worthy of some serious consideration.

Alas Schlesinger hit the proverbial wrong button on his keyboard and sent his comments, not just to Linnebank and the other nine senior managers, but to thousands of Reuters staff around the world. The ensuing boost to morale will no doubt boost performance no end.

GOING LIVE

David Dimbleby: Mr Prescott, have you got any news?

John Prescott: No, I haven't.

Dimbleby: What about turnout? Have you got any impressions?

Prescott: I haven't got an impression. It's too early to tell.

– BBC1 election results coverage.

AD NAUSEAM

SO FAREWELL then, Trevor Beattie, who with the jaw-dropping hubris and gift for self-promotion for which *Eye* readers now know him so well, chose to announce his departure from agency TBWA on election day.

Beattie, of course, devised Labour's election campaign, saw himself as synonymous with the party's success and probably thought there was something deftly symbolic about the premier stepping down now instead of serving another term.

Beattie is nothing if not canny, however, and his comment on Thursday that "I'm leaving because it's the right time" had several TBWA staff nodding rather too emphatically. *Eye* 1120 first suggested he might be losing his touch and so it proved. High profile accounts including News International and Abbey have left TBWA already this year, while the upshot of Beattie's long-running FCUK campaign has been to send French Connection's sales through the floor.

Meanwhile, Beattie's election advertising has varied from the insipid ("If You Value It, Vote for It" is hardly as ingenious as Hague with Thatcher's hair) to the blithely moronic (the Michael Howard/flying pig posters), and it's widely agreed in adland that on every level Saatchi was comprehensively out-thinking whatever Beattie was thinking.

He goes to start-up his own agency, and so will finally get his name above the door. As in any new business, step one will be to snaffle one of his former employer's big clients, and fast. The question is, on current performance, will any of them be willing to go with him?

IN THE midst of a tedious election campaign almost every newspaper was happy to fill space with a story on the ASA's top ten most complained about ads of last year.

Except the *Sun*, where the list didn't even get a mention. This may well have been because sitting at number eight on the list was a misleading computer game offer in, er, the *Sun*, which drew 55 complaints.

DUMB BRITAIN

The *Weakest Link, BBC2*

Anne Robinson: Which single-issue political party was formed by Sir James Goldsmith in 1995 to campaign against European integration?

Contestant: The Conservatives.

AR: Which British prime minister famously said "We have become a grandmother"?

Contestant: John Major.

Brainteaser, Channel Five

Presenter: Which literary hunchback lived in Notre Dame and fell in love with Esmerelda?

Contestant 1: Nostradamus.

Presenter: No, that's not right. I'll have to pass it over.

Contestant 2: Oh, er, it rings a bell... but no, can't think of it.

"I get higher exam marks if a parent dies... but don't feel obliged"

FOOTBALL: HYPE...

IN HIS media column for the *Indie*, Matthew Norman notes a possible motivation for the recent radio rant by former football manager George Graham against Chelsea PR boss Simon Greenberg: it was Greenberg who, as a hack on the *News of the World*, exposed the former Arsenal manager's propensity for taking back-handers during transfer deals. Naturally, Graham had not seen fit to mention this.

Fair enough; but what Norman himself forgot to relate was that he is a good friend of Greenberg, a fellow Spurs fan – and that it was Greenberg who, as sports editor, gave him a column in the *Evening Standard*.

Meanwhile, sports hacks are marvelling at Greenberg's success in persuading certain prominent football writers that Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho was a poor innocent scapegoat in his run-in with UEFA after Chelsea's first-leg match against Barcelona in February. Mourinho claimed that Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard had entered the dressing-room of Swedish referee Anders Frisk at half-time (not true), and that consequently he was "not surprised when Didier Drogba was sent off in the second half" (a clear implication that the ref had been got at, again untrue). Following Mourinho's inflammatory comments, Frisk had death threats from Chelsea fans and was so frightened he has now quit as a referee.

Despite all this, in the past month some newspapers have started portraying Mourinho as hapless victim rather than villain. A triumph for Greenberg the Chelsea spin-doctor, no doubt, but how exactly did he win round the hacks? In a Colemanballs-style outburst last week he grumbled that "some people can't seem to separate the reality from the facts". We hope to have more of the facts, and indeed the reality, before long.

...AND FLANNEL

HENRY WINTER, football writer on the *Daily Telegraph*, was named "specialist correspondent of the year" at the recent British Sports Journalism Awards. What makes him so special? These stylistic samples may offer a clue:

"The Merseysider took the sight of any Chelsea attacker in possession as an affront to his professional expertise and a slur on him as a proud son of Bootle." – Henry Winter on Jamie Carragher, *Daily Telegraph,* 4 May 2005.

"As he walked down the tunnel before kick-off, this proud son of Huyton looked down at the red carpet…" – On Steven Gerrard, 28 April 2005.

"The professional relationship uniting these proud sons of Wrexham has seen many twists and turns." – on Mark Hughes and Robbie Savage, 22 January 2005.

"Few players love representing their country as much as this proud son of Essex." – On David Beckham, 13 October 2004.

"There he was, this proud son of Madeira..." – On Christiano Ronaldo, 1 July 2004.

"This proud son of Rome has ruefully understood his days at the Bridge to be numbered ever since Roman Abramovich swept into west London." – On Claudio Ranieri, 5 May 2004.

"A proud son of France…" – On Middlesbrough's Franck Queudrue, 4 February 2004.

"This proud son of Yorkshire was essentially a simple man." – On David Seaman, 14 January 2004.

Etc, etc, etc...

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

I'M WORRIED ABOUT OUR LITTLE GIRL. SHE'S BEING INFLUENCED BY WHAT SHE READS IN "VOGUE"
YOU MEAN ALL THE SKINNY, ANOREXIC MODELS?
I WISH!!!
VOGUE
WAYNE ROONEY'S FIANCÉE COLEEN PHOTOS
HMMM...
MUM- BUY ME SOME BLING INNIT!!!

DOING THE ROUNDS

Points mean prizes

TONY BLAIR's televised ignorance of the restrictive booking practices used by GPs to hit the 48-hour appointment target was surprising given the department of health has been briefing Downing Street on the issue since last October, and both GPs and patients have been complaining about it for two years.

Yet the inability to book appointments in advance was an entirely predictable consequence of bribing doctors to hit a populist, but clinically flawed, target without the manpower to do so.

In the embarrassingly demeaning, but potentially lucrative, game of point scoring that makes up the 2003 GP contract, English practices were offered 50 points per doctor if they offered all non-emergency patients a face to face meeting with an unspecified GP within 48 hours. These 50 "quality" points are worth an average of £1,250 per GP in 2004/2005, rising to £2,000 per GP in 2005/2006.

The access target was meant to exclude patients who didn't want to be seen within 48 hours or who wanted to see a specific doctor. Indeed, advanced access was meant to cater for those who wish to make appointments well in advance. However, in the panic to collect as many points as possible before the end of year deadline, understaffed practices have been forcing everyone to phone in the morning and accept appointments within 48 hours – and that's if they're lucky enough to get through. Those who give up after half an hour of Vivaldi and march down to the surgery are told they can only book by phone.

So GPs are being paid bonuses for offering patients quick appointments that they often don't need clinically, and increasingly don't want, while others can't get through to make an appointment at all. Indeed, the whole of general practice is being distorted by a protocol-driven risk management system. A patient with a bereavement may have to suffer the indignity of being asked about her smoking and smear status, and have her blood pressure measured, before her GP or nurse can access her computerised notes. In some systems, reminders to medicalise patients' lives appear like porn pop-ups all over the screen.

On the upside, it's likely that the care of patients with specific diseases that the contract targets, such as heart disease and diabetes, will improve. Alas, those with diseases not targeted by the contract are likely to suffer from neglect. A recent survey of GP practices by *Doctor* magazine found that 40.8 percent of GPs sampled thought that patients were worse off because of the contract, and 35.4 percent thought they were better off.

The irony for GPs is that although they hate hitting targets, they're very good at it. The DoH has budgeted for GPs to collect an average 777 points this year, but many have got at least 1,000 (worth £75k for an average practice this year, and £120k next year). Medical accountants are now predicting that GPs in lucrative practices will earn £130K a year. Alas, the bonanza is unlikely to last. Primary care trusts just don't have the £100m required to pay for the extra points, and are busy questioning and auditing scores to delay payment as much as possible. Meanwhile, £184m a day pours into the NHS and you still can't see your GP when you want to. That's progress.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

IS IT TRUE YOU CAN HAVE TATTOOS REMOVED ON THE NHS ?
ONLY IF IT'S CAUSING YOU SEVERE EMOTIONAL DISTRESS
WELL, IT IS VERY EMBARRASSING
I'LL SAY
NHS
SURGERY URGENT

SIGNAL FAILURES

Your cash is going so well

STAGECOACH boss Brian Souter fears the new government won't extend his South West Trains franchise but will invite other companies to bid for it "because it's going so well".

Passengers on SWT's long-distance commuter services might disagree. Their journeys are now up to 20 percent slower than 15 years ago, after SWT padded out the timetables in December to make its punctuality statistics look better. Even that doesn't guarantee better service. According to SWT's figures, there were more delays to SWT "mainline" services in March than in the same month last year.

But Souter wasn't thinking of passengers when he said SWT was "going so well". He was thinking of all the money it makes: a £47m profit this year, analysts reckon – double what Stagecoach says it expected SWT to make.

So where does the extra cash come from? In 2002-03 SWT received £25m from taxpayers. This year, under a staggering franchise deal agreed by Labour in 2003, its subsidy will be about £170m. The deal ditched promises of longer trains and station extensions to ease overcrowding and the money is being used instead to inflate SWT's profits.

There's still no sign the national audit office (NAO) will examine the decision to shovel an unwarranted share of the rail budget into Stagecoach coffers. And as long as this is accepted with a shrug of the shoulders there must be a danger, despite Souter's pessimism, that Stagecoach's franchise could actually be extended.

PICTURES of fare dodgers are being displayed at stations around Birmingham by National Express franchise Central Trains. Fare dodging is bad because it deprives the railway of cash, leaving honest passengers to pay more. The people on the posters tried to deprive Central Trains of £880.

One person who isn't being named and shamed for withholding cash from Central Trains is Phil White, chief executive of National Express. In 2004 his £450,000 salary was bolstered with performance-related bonus and "benefits" totalling £541,000.

The bonus was for a year when Central Trains was so poorly managed that more than one in four trains were late, a shocking figure for a regional franchise. In December, 58 percent of trains were late on the Walsall line and more than 6 percent were cancelled on the Solihull line. Some of Central's routes had all their trains replaced by buses; there are now almost no passengers left and permanent closure is looming.

The potentially valuable new service between Walsall and Wolverhampton could also be axed (*Eye* 1128) because it's lightly used; the local transport executive gave the service little promotion because the trains were so unreliable. Central's main fault was not employing enough drivers. It could have employed 17 more for the £541,000 that went into White's wallet.

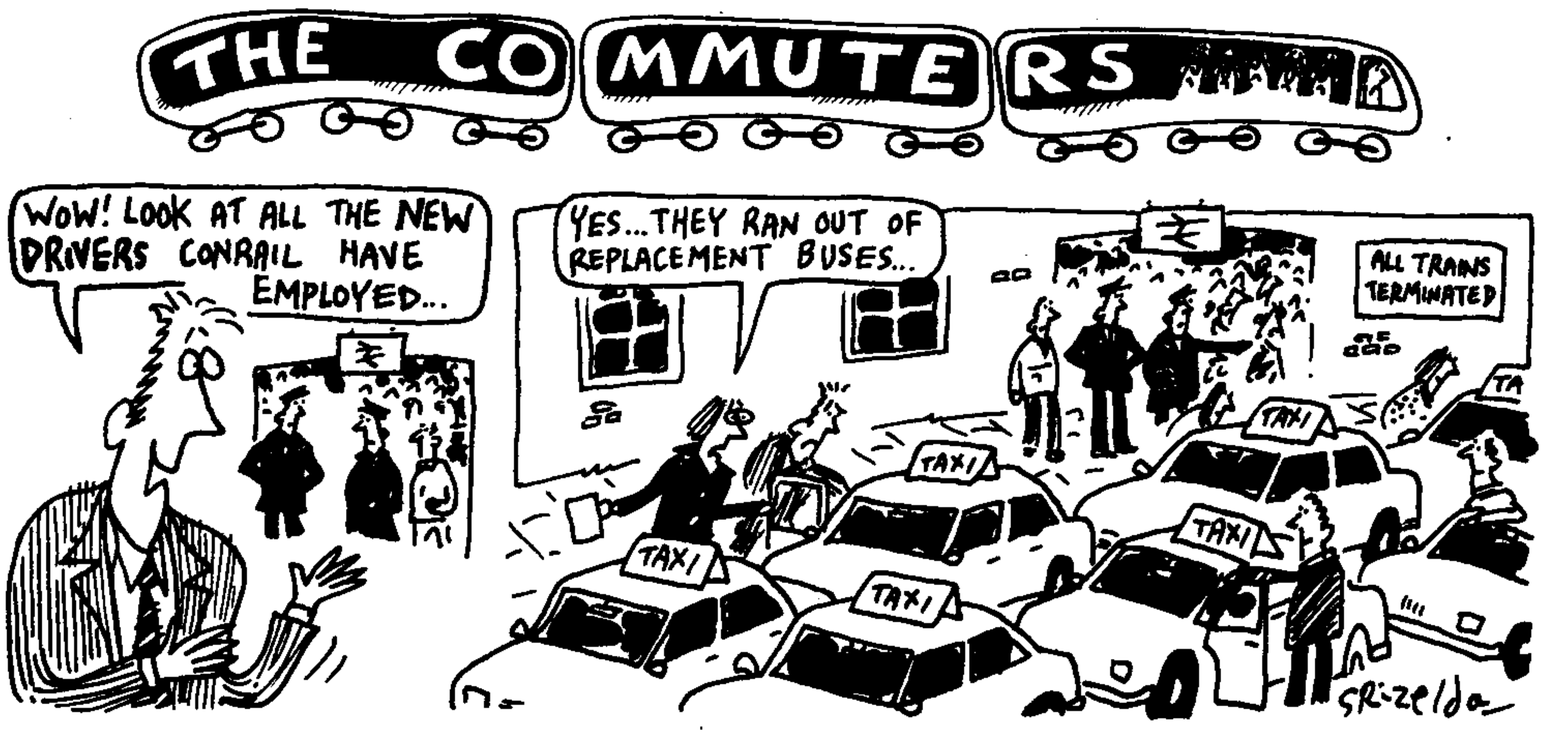
THE most worrying aspect of GNER's new franchise is not the £1.9bn in premium payments, focus of media comment, but the negligible investment.

GNER may manage to double its income to £1bn a year because Britain's worsening transport system will force more people to pay GNER's high fares. The franchise deal ensures that if GNER doesn't hit its income targets, taxpayers will cover most of the shortfall.

But Labour is throwing so much cash at the Virgin West Coast basket case (which still hasn't been refranchised while GNER has twice fought to retain its franchise) that there's nothing left for passengers on the other London-Scotland route. In 1999 GNER complained that its electric trains kept breaking down (*Eye* 975). Then GNER was squeezing an extra 40,000 miles annually, or 17 percent, from each electric train, compared with British Rail. The new franchise is based on flogging the same trains and infrastructure even harder. GNER's diesel trains are nearly 30 years old and face another 10 years' thrashing.

GNER will run 27 more trains daily to Leeds. To avoid blocking Leeds station the trains will return to London immediately, without breathing space to get back on schedule if they arrive late. A quarter of GNER trains are late as it is. Failures are more likely the harder it pushes the assets. If the tracks are more crowded, each fault will delay more trains – and not just GNER's.

'Dr B. Ching'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

HYDER SEEK

LAST issue we told how Hyder Business services (HBS) – the company previously known as Welsh Water – had got off to a shaky start in a 12-year, £200m public-private partnership with Milton Keynes council.

Auditors discovered that HBS had been fiddling performance figures to make itself look better than it was, while making a hash of the council's accounts systems – paying some bills very late but others (in one case £1.8m) more than once. Well, Hyder's name is also mud in Middlesbrough, where the HBS-run "human resources" department has been carrying out a large-scale "job evaluation" (JE) exercise for council staff.

The purpose is ostensibly to ensure that women get equal pay for doing comparable work to male colleagues. In practice, JE has been used by HBS to slash pay for hundreds of staff, male and female. Prior to the exercise staff were assured that around two-thirds of those taking part could expect to see their grade and pay remain the same, the remaining third getting either a rise or a cut. But six months after the process started, the full horror of what the trade unions agreed to has become clear. In the environmental services department, 160 staff out of 161 have had their pay and grades cut. One person had their pay cut from £25,000 to £19,000. Such has been the outrage at the regradings that the council has been forced to set up a "task force" to investigate.

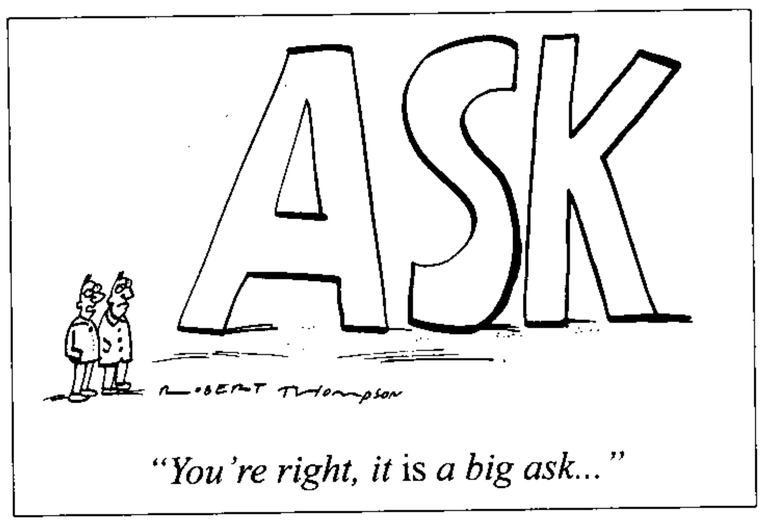
Employees whose trade unions failed them (with the exception of Amicus, which opposed the exercise) are faced with two unpalatable alternatives to get their old grades and pay back. The first is a time-consuming and stressful appeals process; the second is to take on extra duties to win extra JE points and therefore more pay. HBS has coined an amusing piece of Newspeak for this: "Job Enrichment".

LITTER BUGS

IN Labour-controlled Hackney, east London, some residents who put out black refuse sacks on the street at night for collection the following morning have been disturbed by the activities of a phantom bag-slasher who rips open the sacks during the night and strews the contents around the pavement.

This turns out not to be the work of drunks or vandals but of Benjy "the Binman" Pell-style snoopers... employed by Hackney council. After discovering that their bin bags have been tampered with, residents have received letters from the council containing photographs of the contents and a fixed penalty notice for £50 accusing them of, er, "illegal deposit of litter on a public highway".

The rummaging is part of a crackdown on small businesses which attempt to pass off their rubbish as domestic waste, thus avoiding the extra charge applicable to business rubbish. Fair enough. But, at least in one case brought to the attention of the *Eye*, the "business waste" concerned has been no more than a couple of envelopes thrown away by a freelance hack who works part of the time from home. We asked Hackney council if this was nothing more than a scam to scare people into signing up for its business waste contracts. When we went to press the answer, like Hackney's rubbish, was blowing in the wind.



"You're right, it is *a big ask..."*

● ACROSS the river in Tory/Lib-Dem Lambeth, householders who assiduously separate paper, glass, cardboard, cans and plastic from the rest of their household rubbish and put it into special orange bags for recycling, have been encouraged by what Lambeth's refuse contractor, Cleanaway, does with it next. More than once residents have seen Cleanaway workers chucking the orange recycling bags into the back of refuse lorries to be crushed along with the rest of the garbage, which ends up at an aptly-named landfill site at Mucking, Essex. One *Eye* reader who complained to the council was told "we are on top of the problem and dealing with it". But all credit to Cleanaway. By avoiding the polluting effects of a second collection it is surely doing no more than demonstrating its commitment to greenhouse gas reduction!

TELLY ADDICTS

WHAT TO SAY to a valued colleague who has just been suspended following allegations of "corruption in public office"?

Steve Hunt, chief officer for Leeds East Homes (LEH), appears to have the answer: "Go home and watch day-time TV." Tony Johnson and Bill Crosland, both estate workers for Leeds city council, did just that in February 2003, little expecting that they would never go back to work. In total, four LEH employees at the Ebor Gardens estate were subject to allegations which included corruption, deliberately making false statements in estate records in order to wrongly allocate properties to drug dealers (*Eye* 1078), and unlawful possession of firearms.

This final charge, also baseless, was the occasion for Inspector Knacker to arrive at Bill Crosland's house on 5 February 2003, dressed in combat fatigues, in order to take him down to the station for 35 hours of questioning. After an 18-month police inquiry, and an internal council investigation, the matter was dropped with no charges because the allegations were all baseless. They are thought to have arisen from an anonymous tip-off by criminals whose activities the staff were trying to curtail. Mr Crosland was driven into the care of psychotherapists who confirm that "he is severely depressed and devastated by the experiences that occurred in early February 2003".

Tens of thousands of pounds of council money have been spent, but the four employees in question remain suspended on full pay. Only one, Julie McGrath, returned to work in March. Sadly, due to serious ill-health, even she is now back at home, watching day-time TV like the rest.

● INTRODUCING *Slogan Watch*, a new series celebrating the best in meaningless council mission statements. Hastings borough council tells its citizens every day it is "Making the difference". The London Borough of Hillingdon is more modest, only claiming it is "Making *a* difference". Harlow council has a tongue-twisting "Helping to build tomorrow's Harlow today", which is about as meaningful as "Growing the right way for a bigger, better Peterborough." And why not? More contributions welcome...

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

NORD ANGLIA, the educational services company, continues to clean up as Ofsted dishes out more school inspection contracts to the private sector. But is there a potential conflict of interest in Nord Anglia's dominance?

The company recently secured one of five regional schools inspection contracts to review all schools in the north of England, multiplying the number it covers from 178 to 2,718.

However, many of the schools Nord Anglia will be inspecting will also be among the hundreds to which it already also sells services such as training, teacher appointments, administration or even the running of the entire school.

Nord Anglia's success has also spread to further education. In an attempt to cut costs, without any consultation Ofsted's chief inspector Mike Bell has also handed the inspection of FE colleges to Nord Anglia, which is principally known for the number of staff it poaches from the public sector.

As with schools, inspection won't be the company's only interest in FE. Should an inspection identify the need for new or additional staff at any of the 387 colleges, Nord Anglia will be only too pleased to refer them to its recruitment arm – which specialises in the placement of FE lecturers!

PS: Another lucky winner of a regional Ofsted contract in the south east is Prospects Learning Services. Any school unfortunate enough to be criticised (even if it has bought one of Prospect's "improvement" packages) can always hope to do better next time by signing up for another of the company's services – training to deal with Ofsted inspections!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE MAX AND POPPY'S FACES WHEN WE GET TO THEIR FANCY DRESS PARTY!
I HOPE THEY WONT BE TOO SHOCKED... DO YOU THINK WE'VE GONE TOO FAR?
LET THEM BE SHOCKED!
ACCOUNTANTS IT IS!!!
THESE OUTFITS ARE OUTRAGEOUS!

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Friends are the new family." – *Dot Cotton, EastEnders.*

"Banking is the new shopping." – *HSBC recruitment advert.*

"Are resources the new tech?" – *Merrill Lynch Research.*

"Is fly-tipping the new crack dealing?" – *Materials Recycling Week.*

"Titillation is the new gravity." – *Andrew O'Hagan, Daily Telegraph.*

"Having your own T-shirt label is the new DJing." – *Time Out.*

"District court judges are the new junior doctors." – *Sunday Times.*

NOOKS and CORNERS

CONSERVATION has gone too far, the government likes to insist. But not in Bristol it hasn't, to judge by the following tale of betrayal and cynicism.

For the last three decades the *Great Britain* has been painstakingly restored in Bristol Docks by the SS Great Britain Trust. Designed by the now almost mythical engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, this famous ship was launched in the city in 1843 and was not only the largest vessel yet built but the first screw-driven, steam-powered, iron-hulled passenger ship *in the world.*

The rescue of the abandoned hulk from the Falkland Islands in 1970 and her return on a pontoon up the Avon to the dock where she had been built is one of the most moving "heritage" stories of modern times. Moreover, the presence of the *Great Britain* as a tourist attraction in the (listed) Great Western Dry Dock has done much to help regenerate a depressed part of Bristol. Hence, the setting of the ship is important, which is why the trust, supported by English Heritage, wants to generate income by building a reconstruction of the original adjacent Brunel Steam Ship Engine Works which was destroyed by bombing during the Second World War.

This is very fine (though the proposed recreation is not to be wholly authentic: brick rather than stone). But the building which matters most to the environment in which the restored ship is displayed is McArthur's Warehouse in Gas Ferry Road on Spike Island. This former maltings was designed by William Bradford and built around 1897. Though it post-dates Brunel, it is the sort of appropriate industrial building which helps maintain the authentic character of the surroundings of the dock, a conservation area and proposed as a World Heritage Site.

Unfortunately McArthur's warehouse was damaged in the Blitz and has lost its original, massive roof although the brick walls survive. Even more unfortunately, it has been acquired by a developer, Messrs Quada, who in 2000 proposed demolishing the warehouse and replacing it by three seven-storey blocks of flats and offices designed by local architects Barlow Henley, responsible for adorning the area with a number of new fussy multicoloured blocks of flats.

Although this scheme was opposed by English Heritage, Bristol Civic Society and almost all Bristolians with an eye to history, the city council granted planning permission. Two years later, however, after an appeal to the secretary of state, the case was called in and, following a public inquiry, permission for the flats was rescinded on the grounds that they were too large and dominant and would harm the setting of the *SS Great Britain.*

Al Quada then returned with a smaller scheme of only five storeys but still exceeding the council's own Harbourside brief in terms of bulk and still envisaging a security-gated enclave which will restrict public space and scarcely be in the public interest.

Bristol city council (which owns some of the land) obligingly granted planning permission again, thus maintaining its commitment to architectural mediocrity which may be seen all over the city. But English Heritage remained opposed, and commissioned a viability study from the local architects Architecton which demonstrated that, although neglected, the McArthur's warehouse was capable of profitable restoration and conversion. (The suitability of such tough structures for conversion into flats has been shown repeatedly in Docklands and elsewhere.) So the case was called in again on the advice of English Heritage – such is the international significance of Brunel's ship – and a public inquiry was scheduled for February last.

The Bristol Civic Society, the Clifton & Hotwells Improvement Society and others were all ready to give evidence when, at the last minute, having decided to look again at the condition of McArthur's Warehouse, English Heritage suddenly withdrew. The secretary of state then cancelled the inquiry, and at a meeting of Bristol central area planning committee, the Al Quada scheme was endorsed by the casting vote of the chairman, Cllr Richard Eddy, the council's legal and planning officers arguing that it would be wrong to reverse earlier decisions.

So one of the few remaining old warehouses in Bristol Docks will now be demolished and the *Great Britain* by the great Brunel will be seen against a tawdry background of plate glass windows, twee balconies, concrete, steel and new brickwork. Great.

'Piloti'

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

ANY business traveller will tell you how complicated life has become since September 11th unleashed a new tyranny of visa, customs and security requirements. But it's peculiarly tough on travelling musicians.

They already have a lot to deal with as they struggle from one concert to another, panicking over delayed planes, shielding precious instruments from brutal baggage-handlers and paying full-fares to rapacious airlines for their cellos. But thanks to Customs & Excise, things have become even worse – as one of Britain's star young instrumentalists discovered last week.

Richard Harwood is one of the most promising cellists of his generation, which is why the British Council had sent him to Russia to perform the Elgar Cello Concerto in Ekaterinburg. Like most successful cellists, he plays a valuable instrument: a 1682 Rugeri worth so much it's owned by a consortium who make it available to him on permanent loan. But he has a stake in the consortium, and for all practical purposes the cello is his. No issue about it.

That said, whenever he leaves Europe he still has to apply to the department of culture, media & sport for a temporary export licence. It's a waste of time, but he does it. This time, however, when he left for Russia he was told at Heathrow he had to have another permit – a "C88" – on the grounds that the cello was a tool of his trade from which he'd be making a profit. Harwood had never heard of this before and protested that his profit came from *playing* the cello not from *having* it, but to no avail. There was a lot of fuss and form-filling before he was allowed on to the plane, and he was told that on returning to the UK he was legally obliged to go through the red channel and face the C88 procedure all over again.

Being a law-abiding soul, that's what he did: only to find himself detained, on pain of arrest, because the C88 process was for some reason imperfect. That he had the export licence, that he had documents to prove his ownership of the cello, that he was the guest of the British Council, didn't matter. He was interrogated and presented with yet more forms to fill in that he couldn't possibly complete because they required arcane knowledge of import/export codes. When he asked for help it was refused on the grounds that it was not the job of Customs officers to assist. All they would do was supply three bulging lever-arched files of notes that would have taken days to read even if he had been able to understand the legal jargon. He was only released after several hours of argument and anxiety.

If something isn't done soon to check the high-handed and officious jobsworths at Customs & Excise, musicians with expensive instruments will just have to stay at home.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Private Eye

Straw poll

Sir,

I agree that Jack Straw's schmoozing of Paul Bigley (HP Sauce, 1131) isn't much of a reflection on him, but surely there are two worse aspects to the affair. First, as was said at the time, it was appallingly hypocritical for Blair and others to refuse to attend the funerals of soldiers compelled to serve in Iraq (on low pay), but instead to show up to that of Ken Bigley, the privateer who chose to go to Iraq solely for his own financial gain, in spite of the known risk.

As annoying, however, is the media's continuing obsession with Mr Bigley's family. Ordinarily, a person's close emotional involvement with a tragedy would disqualify him or her from commenting on it, due to the understandable bias they might have. Instead, being Ken Bigley's brother seems to make Paul Bigley's views more sought after, and, worse, seems to have elevated him to an expert on international affairs, and indeed domestic ones given the publicity afforded to his views on Boris Johnson's Liverpool visit.

What has gone so wrong with our media?

Yours sincerely,
JAMES WILSON,

London.

Family favourite

Sir,

Re your article on vote-rigging (1131). The barrister acting on behalf of the Labour councillors was in my opinion magnanimous in giving his services free. Myself and my son had to give him up for one whole week because of conferences going on well into the late hours, this we gladly did, and I am immensely proud of him for giving up his time. All I ask of you in appreciation of this is to please! please! print his name correctly.

He is Iain Suggett and not Ian Soggit, although mildly amusing, in order to dignify his efforts I think it appropriate to print an apology, this would be very welcome.

Yours sincerely,
SUSAN WINCHCOMBE-SUGGETT,

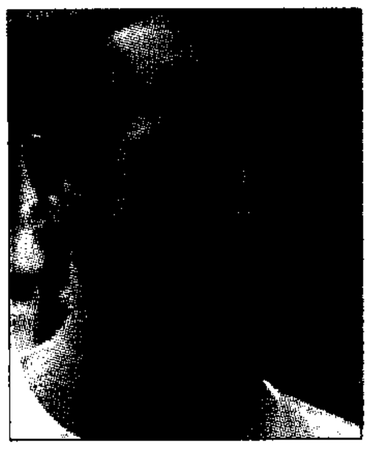
Via email.

● The "letter" in the last Eye ("The Last Word"), apparently from Nigel Imi of the Brighton library service, was in fact a memo Mr Imi had written to fellow library professionals. It was not submitted by Mr Imi to the Eye, nor intended for publication. Apologies for the mix-up. Ed.

"We've found a use for all the old books..."

Lookalike

Martin



Van Gogh

Sir,

Could it be that the late Dutch depressive and Post-Impressionist Vincent van Gogh is an ancestor of Gwyneth Paltrow's spouse Chris Martin, singer in the band Coldplay and father to young Apple?

I had always understood Van Gogh to have died childless. However, Martin is uncannily dedicated to Art and remaining unshaven.

Yours faithfully,
V. HUGHES (MRS),

London E17.

Alldays altercation

Sir,

Your "Woman In The Eye" article in 1131 failed to mention that, in addition to her government appointments and board membership of News International and Friends Provident, Barbara Thomas, as she then was, was also a non-executive director of Alldays, the convenience store operator.

The share price of Alldays exceeded £6 in the late 1990s but, due to uncontrolled growth through its controversial regional development franchise programme whilst she was on the board, shareholders were rewarded with 10p per share when the company fell into the hands of the receivers in October 2002. By this time, she had resigned from the board and thus escaped the scrutiny that might otherwise have ensued. On the basis of her reputation elsewhere, however, maybe this would not have hindered her progress!

Yours faithfully,
DAVID TURNER,

Much Wenlock, Shropshire.

Adverbs at dawn

Sir,

Re "Manifestly Dreadful" (1131): contrary to widely held belief, "first" can be both an adjective and an adverb as it already stands, whereas "second" cannot and therefore requires an adverbial suffix ("secondly").

Vincent Cable could therefore be correct if his "First and most important..." were both intended adjectivally. There is rather less doubt concerning the error of your reviewer, who contends that it would be wrong to write "First and most importantly": in point of fact an adverbial form is a reasonable choice here and it is perfectly legitimate to use "first" as an adverb interchangeable with "firstly". Your reviewer might care to reflect also upon his own formulation, "...To do justice to whoever [sic] put this... together, it does at least have... a certain weary pithiness": more than can be said for his own somewhat laborious piece of one-upmanship – or, indeed, mine.

Yours faithfully,
FRANCIS POTT,

Winchester, Hampshire.

Flight of fancy

Sir,

Extending the runways at Lydd Airport (In The Back, 1130) may prove a blessing in disguise for the local residents.

I live in the flight path of Southampton Airport, whence the Trislanders mentioned in the report depart for the Channel Islands. Without a doubt, these are the noisiest aircraft flying commercially today, with a peculiarly penetrating drone which persists for the extraordinary length of time that they struggle manfully to gain height across the city.

At least the 737s and Airbus 320s are gone within seconds of take-off, without leaving a noise footprint reminiscent of a thousand mopeds at full throttle.

Yours etc,
CHRIS ELLIOTT,

Southampton.

Winner takes all

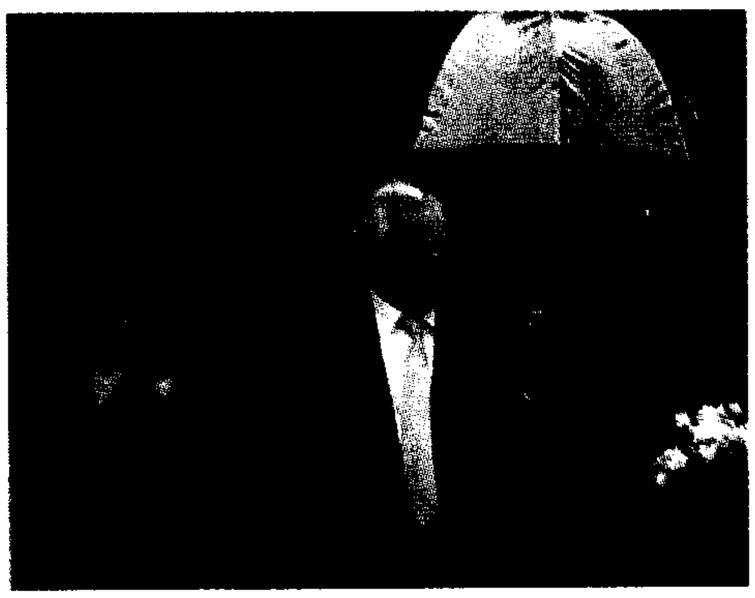
Sir,

I'm sure we all admired this modern day Sir Walter Raleigh ensuring that his Monarch was protected from the elements.

Keep up the good work.

ELIZABETH WOOD,

Irthlingborough.



Bean counter

Sir,

You laugh in Dumb Britain (1131) at the Weaker [sic] Link contestant who, asked what "h" is a common variety of beans used to make baked beans, answered "Heinz". I fear both Weaker Link and the Eye thought they were haricot beans.

But canned baked beans are made from navy beans, a white bean similar to but not the same as haricots.

Yours pedantically,
CHRISTOPHER CHIPPINDALE BA PHD MIFA FSA,

Cambridge.

Woolly thinking

Sir,

*At the risk of outdoing William Schofield (Letters, 1131), may I bother to point out that there's no such thing as a Missoni necklace (Premiersh*ts, Eye 1131), Missoni being famous for their motley knitwear?*

Bet you won't publish this for fear of giving out too dreary a readership image.

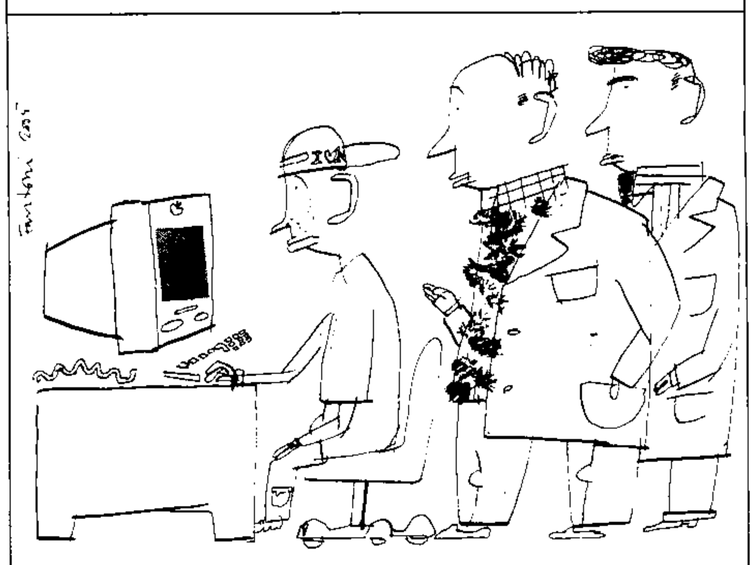
NAME & ADDRESS SUPPLIED,

Paris.

Pinter: 'My enerrdgdvdbdent directions errdgdvd Pinter: 'Myerrdgdvdbdent enerrdgdvdbdent directions errdgdvd Pinter: 'Myerrdgdvdbdent directfghfgh ghmions -BRUNO VINCENT-

Photo caption, Independent

Scenes You Seldom See



"He's useless with computers. I'm always having to show him what to do"

Talking Boulez

Sir,

I was interested to read your piece on music in Scotland (Eye 1131), especially your reference to James Dillon.

I am not a 'very serious person' nor do I have a moustache (at least, not the last time I looked); I have never been to Donaueschingen or Darmstadt.

But I have heard performances of Dillon's music at the proms, at Huddersfield and numerous other venues in the UK.

Impossibly obscure it is not; interesting and challenging and at times moving, it is.

New music, being new, surely needs adequate time for rehearsal, not a mere four or five hours. One can understand Dillon's frustration, if his work was not given enough time and respect in performance.

I had thought better of Private Eye. Be fair!

Yours,
ANNALIVIA LIMB,

Dolphinton.

White mischief

Sir,

The cartoon about Robert Mugabe rather missed the point. There were plenty of hangings during Mugabe's childhood, but they were carried out by the white settlers.

Yours faithfully,
MARTIN EDWARDS,

Via email.

Hats off!

Sir,

For Pete's sake! Luton was once a centre of the hat-making trade and the football team is known as the Hatters. In answer to a question about the origin of Panama Hats which obviously doesn't expect the answer "Panama", Luton is an astute response.

ALAN MYERS,

Hitchin, Herts.

Kok up

Mijne heren,

In 1130 (In The Back, "We Shall Not Be Taxed") you mention Wim Kok as the "former head of the European bank"! You should, of course, have named Wim Duisenberg. Wim Kok is one of Holland's ex-prime ministers and a socialist one at that! **And** *Kok is a non-executive director at Shell. See where socialism gets you!*

With greetings from the land of herrings, tulips, grass and jenever.

MIKE HAYES,

Radio 270 (rtd), Amsterdam.

"Me too – first sign of a daffodil and it's on with the stupid trousers and the silly shoes"

Gorgeous George

Sir,

How we all laughed at your story in HP Sauce (1131) of how human rights campaigner George Galloway, having kept quiet in Bangladesh and failed to condemn human rights abuses in Burma, appeared on al-Jazeera arguing for the release of Tariq Aziz.

It seems such a shame to puncture the hilarity by actually bringing the truth into play, but Galloway's comments on al-Jazeera that Tariq Aziz is being held illegally in prison in Baghdad are perfectly correct. Galloway's point was that either charges need to be brought against him and he needs to be tried or he should, indeed, be released.

Not quite so side-splittingly amusing but nevertheless a more accurate account.

Yours faithfully,
GRAHAM BROOK,

Wilmslow, Cheshire.

SOLUTIONS

"Room Solutions" – *paint and wallpaper shop*

"Progressive Fenestration solutions" – *windows*

"Assured Highway Solutions" – *road signs*

"ACO: Intelligent Drainage Solutions" – *drains*

"Arcane Fabric Engineering Ltd: Tensile structure solutions" – *marquees*

"Customer Interaction Solutions" – *call centres*

"Bisley: Storage solutions in steel" – *filing cabinets*

All submitted by readers

The trauma of trawling

Sir,

I read with interest the article entitled "Trawling For The Truth". I would agree that not all former care workers and teachers accused are innocent and it is clear that former residents were abused as can be seen from the many guilty pleas.

However, there is little doubt in my mind that the justice system is unable to discern between those genuinely guilty and those who are innocent. Clearly there must be reasonable doubt when retired teachers in their 60s without any previous convictions are suddenly arrested and charged with these heinous crimes. The juries are not truly representative of the public as two thirds of the middle classes avoid their responsibilities. This situation is now being altered. Hysteria over child abuse fuelled by the tabloid press and a growing compensation culture also have their part to play.

I am a retired teacher as is my twin brother. My brother taught for over 25 years retiring early (due to ill health) with an unblemished teaching record. In 1998 he was accused of abuse said to have occurred over 20 years before. All who accused him had long criminal records, one had already shown an interest in compensation. Only one complainant went to the police after publicity about care home cases, the rest were trawled. There were no school records or social services records available. Faced with multiple accusations the jury convicted.

We are faced with the task of trying to find evidence to prove that these alleged offences did not happen! So far this has cost the family over £6,000. We are totally disillusioned with a justice system that pays more attention to gaining convictions that it does to find the truth.

E.V. ARGYLE,

Droitwich Spa, Worcs.

Sir,

Having just read your report of the appeal findings re: care home case 29/04/05, I would like to praise you on your balanced article.

I am writing from personal experience of a very similar occurrence from the former approved school where I taught for 15 years. This centred around false allegations being made against three former staff, some dating back 30 years. Staff rotas were a crucial element then in proving their innocence. Staff rotas were not used by the police to discredit the ludicrous claims of former pupils, but enough evidence was put together by former staff to prove that the allegations were false. Former pupils were "trawled" by police, and the quality of police investigations was extremely poor.

Operation Goldfinch commenced in 1996; 83 institutions were investigated by S. Wales police; 578 former pupils (adults by then) made 1,613 allegations against 581 former staff; 315 staff were arrested. There were 13 guilty verdicts, two not guilty verdicts, five trials pending at time of release of these figures by ACPO, and 22 dismissed by CPS, which leaves 273 unaccounted for from staff who were arrested.

How many lives ruined, how many families devastated, how many innocent men in prison?

How many caring professional people with their careers in tatters?

The real victims are the many innocents still in prisons, and the ones who have served their sentence and are STILL trying to clear their names.

Yours sincerely,
MRS HARRISON,

Via email.

Sir,

I'm glad to see you recognise the injustice of Operation Goldfinch. Perhaps now the editor would be willing to retract his claim, made on BBC Question Time, that Derek Brushett, an exemplary headteacher and later inspector of social services in Wales, was a paedophile who was part of a "cover-up" of the alleged widespread goings on in north Wales children's homes. This claim was made on the publication of the Waterhouse report in 2000.

Mr Brushett was a victim of Operation Goldfinch brought about by the prior chain of events supported by Private Eye. These were aided by the misjudged enthusiasm of Paul Foot, whose weather eye deserted him in this quest, and who became the victim of the glancing shots of opportunists, unwittingly assisting in the proliferation of widespread injustice as exposed by Richard Webster in his withering analysis in The Secret of Bryn Estyn.

By any reasonable standards of investigation, Derek Brushett, along with many others, is innocent. He is currently serving a 12-year sentence for his endeavours in improving the lot of the disadvantaged – something which he ironically and characteristically continues to do in his lot as a prisoner, while his family and friends suffer their loss with the quiet dignity of faith in the eventual triumph of truth and justice.

At the time of the publication of Waterhouse, the editor was not to know of the gross deceit this furnished. Now the truth has emerged, it is to be hoped that he will turn his attention to righting the many wrongs, including his own.

Yours sincerely,
MARGARET JERVIS,

Via email.

PIN head

Sir,

Nicholas's cartoon (very good) on page 37 of Eye 1131 refers to "PIN number". This is tautology; or am I a boring old fart?

Keep up the good work.

Yours,
BILL DEAS,

Le Pouget, France.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"This isn't a rational decision – I've been thinking about this for quite a while."
RONNIE O'SULLIVAN
(Iced Noodle)

"This is the first time this plane has taken off from the ground."
Presenter, BBC News 24
(Toni Miernik)

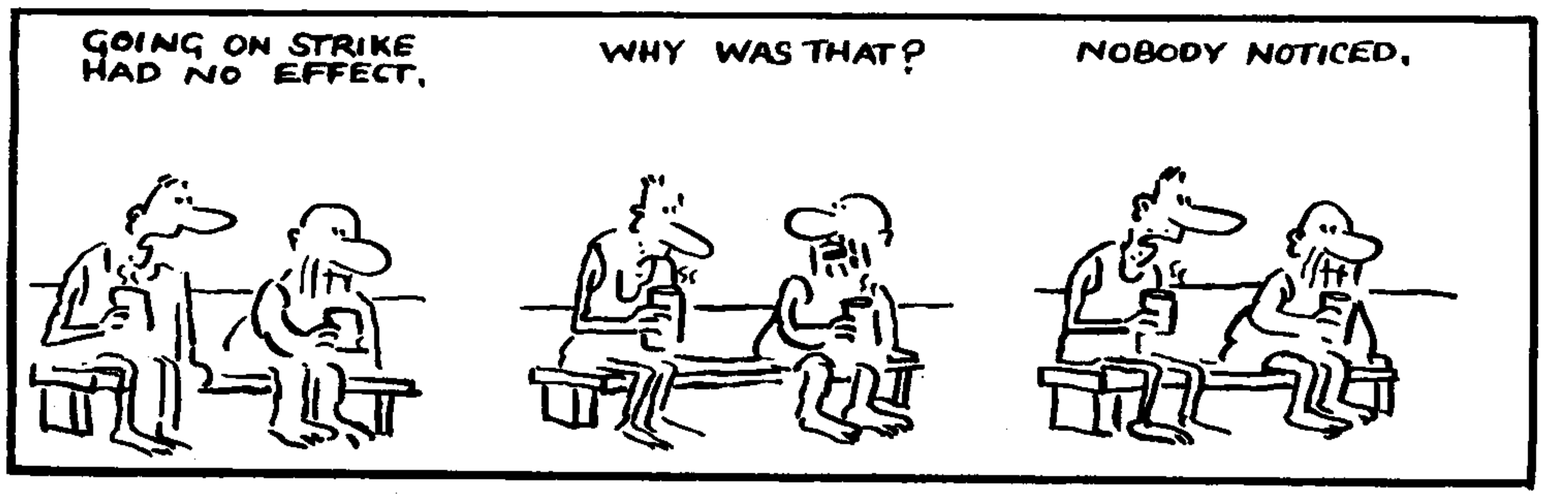
"For too long the other main political parties have damaged Northern Ireland politics. It's our turn."
Alliance Party spokesman, ITN
(Mark Farmaner)

"You've hit the word right on the head."
RAY WILKINS, Sky Sports
(P. Mansfield)

"Up there in the audience is friend and fellow teacher Kelly, who's grinning like some sort of Cheshire cheese."
CHRIS TARRANT, ITV
(Matthew Nash)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Manila**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE Philippines does not have an insurgency and it is 20 years since we overthrew our dictator. Our haven of democracy in east Asia, with our courts and guaranteed rights to freedom of expression, make us a much, much safer place for reporters than, er, well, only Iraq actually.

Bleating hacks complain that nearly 70 of their number have been killed since the departure of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, with deaths running at more than one per month since last year. Happily, our justice system is on the case, with an impressive total of one murder solved and one conviction recorded.

Take the case of Robert Mariano, a broadcaster with DCJC-Aksyon Radio, in the northern city of Laoag. One Saturday night last August, on his programme *Roger Mariano in Action*, he lambasted an illegal gambling racket in the city and implied that the local police chief was turning a blind eye to it. He also broadcast allegations of monkey business at the local electricity cooperative. A coincidence, surely, but after the show Mariano then ran into an ambush on his way home on his motorcycle and was shot 10 times in the back and head with automatic rifles.

With no apparent irony, provincial governor Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jnr (yes, the son), denounced the killing as "another blow to the right of anyone to free speech" and lauded Mariano for being at the forefront of the crusade against corruption among public officials. The case was typical in that it involved a radio broadcaster saying rude things about dodgy local officials, but our hardworking police have yet to bring in any suspects.

Our fourth estate is not happy with this state of affairs. The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines has enlisted support from overseas from the International Federation of Journalists, Reporters Sans Frontières and the Committee to Protect Journalists to complain about the "climate of fear" in which journalists here work and the "culture of impunity" that protects their killers.

President Gloria Arroyo has leapt to defend those brave souls who put themselves in the line of fire by exposing crime, corruption and other wickedness, promising their killers: "Your days are numbered." She didn't say what that number would be, but a change is definitely in the air.

Or perhaps not. For, as well as corrupt and violent local officials, policemen and so on, elements of the media have a lively reputation of their own. They are so common we even have a name for them: *hao hsio*. These are amateur extortionists who dig up dirt about some petty or middle-ranking official, buy some air time on a local radio station and then demand money from the victim in exchange for keeping quiet.

Often the blackmail victim is even more rotten, and instead of wasting time and money (and risking exposure) by seeking legal redress, will invest 5,000 pesos (a hefty £50) to hire a hitman to solve the problem.

Nobody suggests Robert Mariano was like this (although earlier in his career he was once charged with killing someone but subsequently cleared). But if foreign journalists or white people had been targeted, perhaps there might be more impetus for change.

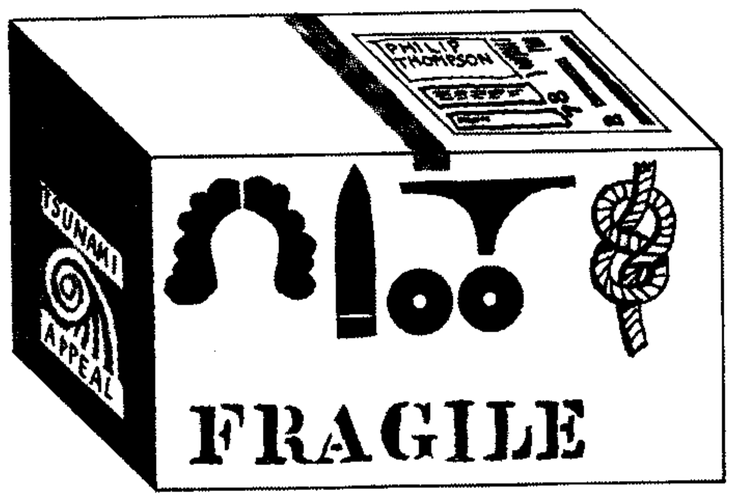
Of course there are honest journalists and local officials and police officers in our country with a sincere desire to see the rule of law prevail. Some of these honest journalists pay for their integrity with their lives. And so for that matter do honest local officials and policemen. Heaven forbid that a few good apples though would spoil our sordid barrel of compost, in which so many are on the take.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "We had a staff of eight on the ship travelling to Sri Lanka," Elli Xenou told journalists in Colombo, "with six hundred tons of aid to help victims of the Boxing Day tsunami. And because it had been collected by the Greek Orthodox Church, we hadn't thought it necessary to check what was inside the boxes. So when we arrived at the harbour and started opening the containers, we were shocked and angered by what we found. Because instead of the blankets, tents, and practical clothing we'd expected and needed, many of the boxes contained carnival wigs, rubber thongs, false plastic breasts, vibrators, erotic lingerie, and bondage gear."

Xenou (who is director of the Doctors of the World foreign mission) had just arrived in the Sri Lankan capital on a commandeered cruise ship, in an operation coordinated by the Greek



Foreign Ministry. "Some of the boxes contained useful equipment, but there was a considerable amount of stuff that should definitely not have been there. Of the 600 tons we transported, I'd say that half of it was unacceptable, and a lot of it was downright filthy and thoroughly offensive. It's a disgrace."

But Dimitris Fourlemadis (director of the Orthodox Church's charity) tried to play down the affair. "It's true that some boxes may have contained suspect clothing, but the figure was very small. Even if there were two, or ten, or maybe a couple of hundred boxes with thongs and wigs in them, that's still a very small number. Hardly worth mentioning really." *(Daily News [Sri Lanka], 21/2/05. Spotter: Tim Todd)*

– ● –

● *"Our wet nurses are of a good calibre," Chen Shunqiang of the Bang Bang household services company told a press conference in Yangzhou (Jiangsu Province), "and produce milk of an excellent quality. A lot of well-paid working women here in the city are worried that breastfeeding might damage their nipples, ruin their figures, make them put on weight, or ruin their careers. And there are a lot of poor women from the countryside who have had to give up their own baby, or have had a still-born child, and would be happy to be paid 50 yuan a day to breastfeed someone else's baby. Rich people have been employing poor women as wet nurses for centuries, and our wet nurses all have to pass stringent health checks to ensure that they are not carriers of contagious diseases. So what's the problem?"*

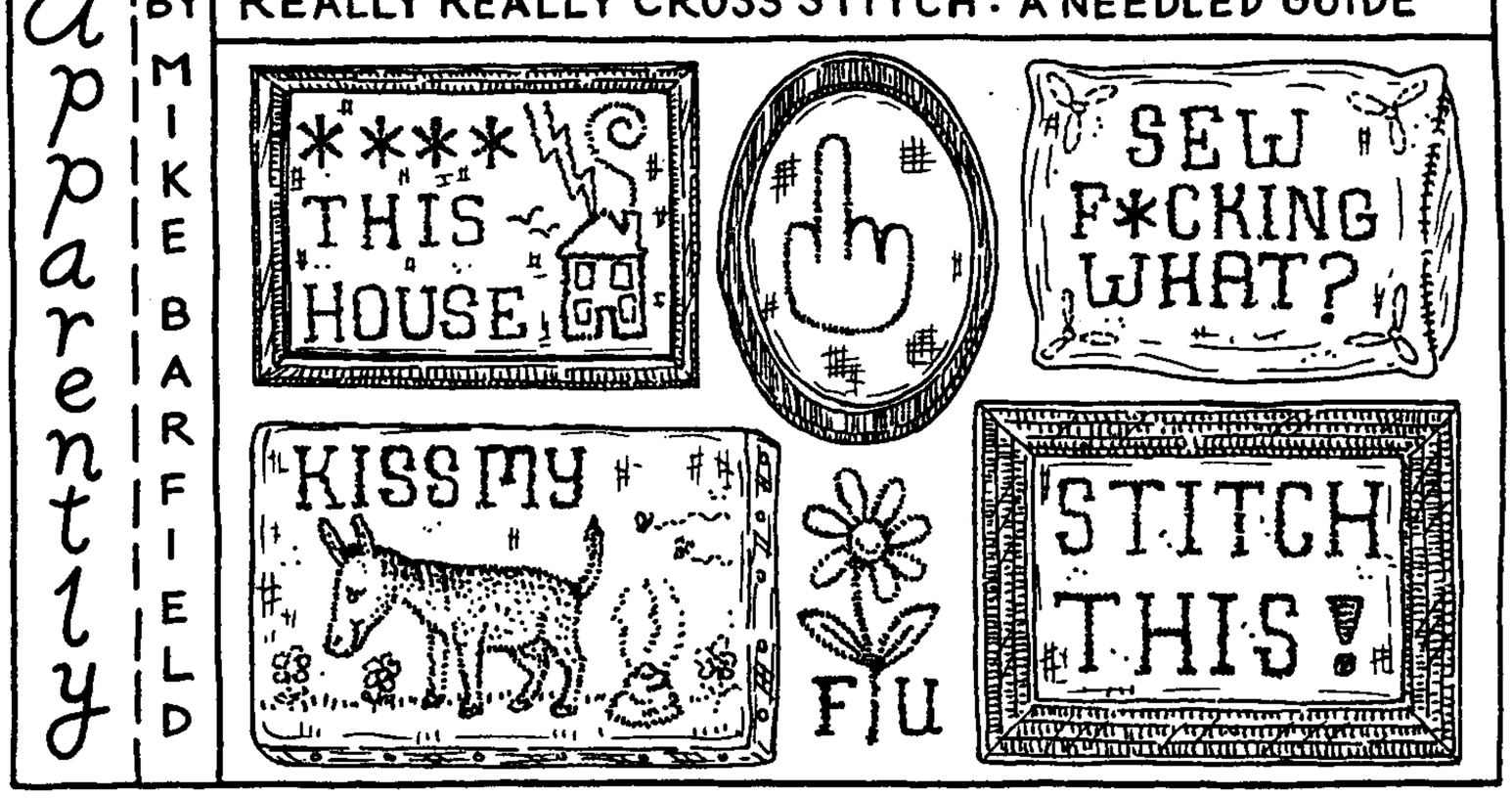
But despite recruiting dozens of willing wet nurses, and attracting dozens of career women as clients, widespread media criticism has forced the Bang Bang company to shelve plans to launch a pay-on-demand breastfeeding service. "Wet nursing is exploitative," declared the Shanzi Commercial Daily, "and the company is trying to revive an inhumane and degrading practice. In this commercialised society, it seems that money is involved in everything, even the closest human relationships." (Taipei Times, 22/2/05. Spotter: Michael Baxter)

– ● –

● "We came up with the idea after reading about how elephant dung paper has become a huge tourist product in Africa and Asia," Joanna Gair of the Creative Paper Tasmania company told a product pre-launch in Hobart. "Then I discovered that in Scandinavia, elk poo paper is the stationery of choice in most offices, and that got me thinking that we should create a uniquely Tasmanian paper. And what better raw material could we use than kangaroo dung?"

Gair was speaking ahead of the full launch later this spring of a full range of handmade "Roo Poo" paper products, all created from wallaby and kangaroo dung. "Roo Poo paper is the ultimate in recycling, and it reinforces the ecological message of our company. Half the fibre pulping has already taken place inside the animal, which means that the bulk of our work has already been done. Our only problem is that we're having difficulty in getting the quantity of dung we need. We need about 25kg of kangaroo manure to produce 400 sheets of A4 paper, so we'll need several tons of it before we can launch our full range of products, including cards and paper. And that's a lot of plop. We're hoping that the community will help us by collecting kangaroo and wallaby dung for us wherever they see it, and dropping it off in plastic bags. Recycled bags of course." *(The Advocate [Tasmania], 15/2/05. Spotter: Melanie Lovatt)*

Apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

"He that is first shall be first.
He that is last is nowhere!"

(Book of Polls, 13.7)

Hello,

And, let's be honest, it's a humble "hello" this morning and I won't pretend that you haven't given me a lot to think about during the course of our parish elections. There have been lessons to learn and messages to take on board. And many of you had some really interesting things to say, you know, about the great crusade against the Evil One, and all of that. And, hey, I respect your views!

In the days to come I shall certainly be mulling all these things over and coming up with some suggestions as to how we can reconcile our differences and move forward with a common agenda to the sort of future we can all agree about.

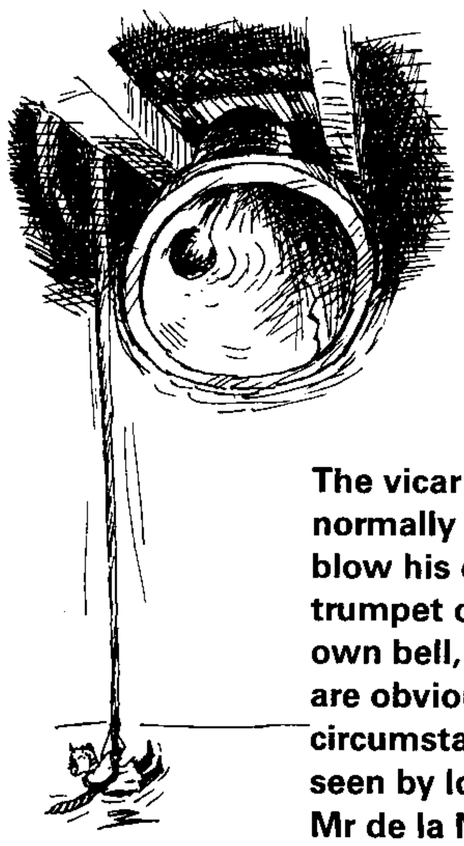
Because that's what you're telling me, isn't it? You're telling me that you believe that I'm the right guy for the job and that you trust me to deliver when the going gets tough. Because when you put your cross (symbolic or what?) next to the Vicar's name you made it clear that you wanted *me* in the parish hot-seat and no one else!

Is that clear enough for everyone – not to mention any names, Gordon!

Yet, to hear some people talking, you might think that I had lost and that I was no longer vicar! Isn't that incredible?

The truth is that I have made history in the parish by being vicar three times in a row!!

That is the "Good News" that we want to shout from the rooftops. That is the "Good News" that we want to tell to the whole world! That is the "Good News" that the bells need to ring out!



The vicar is not normally one to blow his own trumpet or ring his own bell, but there are obviously special circumstances!! (As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede)

And did anyone notice what day it was when I gained my great victory over the powers of darkness? Any of the children? No, Wayne, it wasn't the Champions League Semi-Final, though that was a great game, wasn't it, and you'll notice that the men in *red* won!

Yes, Rashid, *your* hand is up. That's right! Ascension Day! And how does that great hymn go that we sing on that great occasion? "Hail the day that sees him rise!" See any similarities there?

So that's the thought that I want you all to take home today. Your Vicar has listened to what you have to say – I have opened your letters, I have read your emails and your texts. And what I say to you is that I will treat your views with exactly the same degree of attention that I have always done in the past. And I can't say fairer than that, can I?

In fact, I've written a new chorus which we will all sing together at the great service of humble thanksgiving.

I'm listening and I'm learning.
But are you?
I'm listening and I'm learning.
Yes, it's true.
I'm listening and I'm learning.
But the Vicar's not for turning.
I'm listening and I'm learning.
Indeedy-do. (Repeat)

Words and music © T. Blair 2005.

Yours in victorious humility,

Tony

The Vicar's New Team Ministry

OLD	NEW
The Vicar	The Vicar
Mr Prescott	Mr Brown
Mr Brown	Mr Prescott
Mr Blunkett	Mr Straw
Mr Straw	Mr Blunkett
Mrs Jowell	Mrs Hewitt
Mr Reid	Mr Hoon
Mr Hoon	Mr Reid
Mrs Hewitt	Mrs Jowell

Yes, it's all change at St Albion's. Remember – Forward Not Backwards! T.B.

THANKS!

I'd like to give a big thank-you to all those who worked so long and hard to make our campaign such a success. You all did a splendid job and it would be invidious for me to single out one individual for special mention.

So sorry Gordon – there isn't room to thank you personally. T.B.

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr Galloway, who suggested that I would burn in hell. May he remember that people who insult the Vicar are much more likely to burn in hell or be struck by lightning – particularly when they have been sucking up to the Islamic community, and let us pray that none of the more extreme members of that community may take offence at Mr Galloway's remarks and decide to chop his hands off! T.B.

A Safe Pair of Hands!

Mr Blunkett leads the congregation in prayers of thanksgiving for keeping his house and getting his job back. Well done, David!

VALE

I'm sorry to have to say that our trusted curate, Mr Milburn, who disappeared during the election, has sadly decided to take early retirement in order to spend more time with his family – again. Goodness knows what they think about this! Perhaps they wish he'd spend more time with *us* and were glad to see the back of him. I know exactly how they feel – no offence, Alan!

So, thank you, Alan, for all you did – even though it wasn't very good or very helpful. T.B.

A Message From Mr Campbe To The Voters Of The Parish

Fuck off! I hate you all. A.C

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, May 6, 2005

BLAIR CRUSHED IN HOWARD'S NIGHT OF VICTORY

By Our Political Staff
Paul Dacresofspacetofill

NO WONDER Tony Blair's face was white with shock as the news filtered through that he had won a historic third term.

Blair could baredly conceal his humiliation at the final announcement that Michael Howard's Conservatives had romped home to defeat.

House Prices Will Fall

Blair's faltering speech gave the game away as he smiled and waved to his supporters after the devastating blow of winning with a 67-seat majority began to take its toll.

Immigration Will Rise

The scale of Mr Howard's victory was immediately apparent when the Tory leader told weeping Party workers, "I resign."

FULL STORY pp. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 94

WHO ARE THEY?
The Frontrunners To Succeed Michael Howard

DAVID DAVID, 57. Hotly tipped to take the Tory hot-seat, David David is a high-flying man in a suit of whom you have never heard. **Evens favourite**.

LIAM FOX, 43. Currently Shadow Spokesman for Shadow Spokesmen, Fox has a suit and flies high. Friends say that they have never heard of him. **Odds 7/2**.

MALCOLM RIFKIND. Intensely old at 58, Rifkind is unlikely to become leader, due to the age of his suit and his tendency to wear spectacles. Friends say that despite being a Scotsman he is not known for flying – either high or low. **Odds 10/1**.

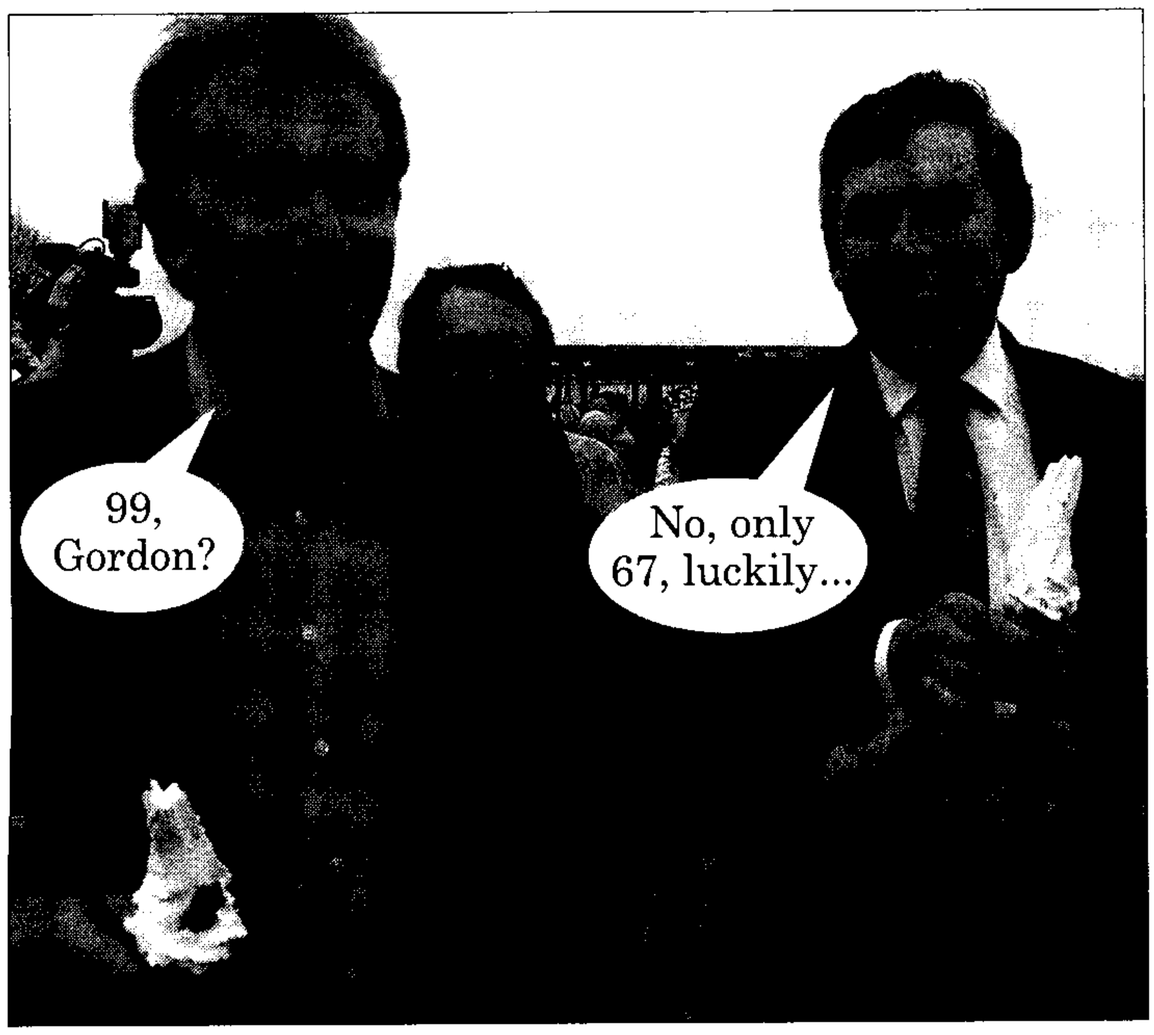
MICHAEL GOVE, 17½. Intensely intense, Gove is part of the young "Notting-ham set", whose aim is to "wear suits, fly high and have some friends". **Odds 50/1**.

JUSTINE TOTTY, 21. Dark horse after her surprise victory at Putney, Totty represents the new face of young Toryism. She rejects spectacles and favours a two-piece suit and will appear on the front page of the Telegraph. **Odds 100/1**.

MR INCREDIBLE, 49. Red-suited, retired super-hero now hoping to start flying again and return to active politics as leader of the Conservatives

(Cont. p. 94)

ELECTION RESULT SHOCK!



BIRMINGHAM SOUTH FIRST TO DECLARE

BIRMINGHAM South has surprised many Westminster observers by being the first constituency to declare during the General Election, smashing the previous record of 40 minutes set by Sunderland South by two weeks two hours and thirty minutes.

"Yes, we actually declared on April 23rd, thanks to the lack of any proper controls on this country's postal voting system," said the newly-elected Labour

(cont. p. 94)

THAT LABOUR GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE IN FULL

- Tony Blair to be replaced by Gordon Brown.
- Er... that's it.

THE COUNT AT FOLKESTONE & HYTHE

PAXMAN INTERVIEWS GOD

Paxman *(for it is he)*: Not going too well, is it?

God *(for it is He)*: Er...

Paxman: It's a bloody disaster, isn't it? War, Famine, Plague, Death. Not a pretty picture.

God: Well, er...

Paxman: Come on, really! You have to have a better answer than that. Your opponent is just running away with it...

God: You see, I...

Paxman: No, no, that's not good enough. Let's face it, you're just an old bearded has-been who should just pack it in...

(Continues all night)

LAWYERS WIN MATERNITY PAY CASE

by Our Legal Staff **Joshua Rosenbeard and Phil Boots**

LEGAL history was made yesterday when a group of lawyers was awarded £390,000 for looking after a small maternity case.

Said a spokesman for the lawyers, "None of us can remember what the case was about but we are delighted that it lasted so long and we feel we were totally vindicated in spinning it out at the taxpayers' expense.

"What is important at the end of the day is that we were awarded custody of the money, which we shall look after extremely well."

That Farewell 'Breakfast With Frost' Menu in full

Choice of Frosties or Cheerios

– ❋ –

Old Ham, Fried Brains and Scrambled Ego

or

Poached Gags with Wafffles, Syrup and Old Chestnuts Purée

– ❋ –

All washed up with Vintage Champagne in the Arse

– ❋ –

All supplied direct from the Gaga oven

Maundy Thursday, 24th March
7.30pm The Lord's Last Supper
(With fish and chips for all the family)

St Matthew's Church, West Ham

POETRY CORNER

Lines On Hearing The First Bluebell Of Spring by David Blunkett, the former Home Secretary and People's Poet Laureate

Bluebells are blue,
Labour is red.
Can I have my job back?
(That's enough. Ed.)

E.J. Blunkett
(17½ lovechildren)

That Historic John Humphrys Interview In Full

John Humphrys *(for it is he)*: Mr Humphrys, you've just announced your retirement from the Today programme. But, let's face it, you're irreplaceable, aren't you?

John Humphrys *(for it is also he)*: Well, John, I think that's...

Humphrys: No, Mr Humphrys, with respect, that's not the question. What listeners want to know is how can anyone possibly replace you as the most fearless and brilliant interviewer in the history of radio?

Jim Naughtie: Well, there are some other contenders, you know, who've got a pretty strong claim...

Humphrys: Could I be allowed to finish what I was saying, which is that you cannot conceivably imagine that there could be anyone half as...

Humphrys: I'm going to have to stop you there, Mr Humphrys, because we've got Sarah Montague with some breaking news.

Montague: Apparently, there's someone called Hitler, who's died *(cont'd. kHz 94.3)*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Johnnie Stewart, Television Producer and Deviser of *Top Of The Pops*

So. Farewell then
Johnnie Stewart,
TV producer and
Creator of the BBC's
Legendary chart
Show *Top*
Of The Pops.

"Hi there, pop pickers!"
That wasn't your
Catchphrase.

Neither was "I'll
Give it five."

Keith said, "Now it is
A case of 'Pop
Of The Clogs'."

E.J. Thribb
(Top Of The Poets)

E.J. Thribb will be appearing at the Wye-on-Wye Literary Festival, reading from his new anthology *Wrong Sort Of Leaves On The Grass*. He will also discuss Sir Harold Pinter OM's new collection of war poetry *Fuck Bush* (Faber, £19.99).

the PREMIERSH*TS

SO HERE WE ARE WITH ANOTHER MEETING OF MAN. UTD AND ARSENAL
AND LOOKING AT THE 2 MANAGERS IT'S OBVIOUS WHAT THE F.A. CUP MEANS TO THEM...
FUCK ALEX!
FUCK ARSENE!

Duchess of Love

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas*, *Heir of Sorrows*, and *Born To Be Queen Consort.*

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles and Camilla have now been blissfully married for a whole month. But is all as well as it seems?

Now read on...

"THIS organic coffee of yours is not so bad after all!" Camilla drained the exquisite bone china Wedgwood Benn cup of its last delicious drop and reached for her usual post-breakfast Chirac Untipped Extra Strength.

As she drew the tarry Gallic vapours deep into her generous embonpoint, Charles coughed, trying in vain to fight back his irritation at his new bride's morning ritual.

"If you have to do this smoking thingie," he said, as he surveyed with distaste the packet showing a prancing man in a beret proudly brandishing a copy of the new EU Constitution, "couldn't you at least choose a British brand?"

"You mean, like you driving your BMW?" she riposted with a teasing smile.

"Anyway, I'm off to brew up some more coffee," she went on.

As she rose, Charles placed a restraining hand on the silken sleeve of her Jose Mourinho peignoir.

"Hang on, Cammers, old thing. There's no need for you to do that. Just ring the bell and a little man will come along and do it for you."

"But I like doing it," his bride persisted. "It's the sort of thing a wife likes to do for her husband."

"Yes, I sort of see what you mean," Charles stuttered. "But it's not what we do here. I mean, the staff wouldn't like it, if you come barging into their kitchen thingie and start to turn on the gas in the fridge and all that sort of thing."

Camilla looked amazed. "You mean, I can't even go into my own kitchen any more?"

Charles shifted uncomfortably, retying the belt of his Old Gordonstounian dressing gown, a personal present from the old headmaster, Dr Himmler, with its proud badge showing a member of staff hitting a boy with a wet towel, over the school motto *'Semper Miserabilis'*.

"You see, what you've got to realise, Cammers, is that things are different now. You're one of the family now, one of the firm. I mean, there's a whole lot of things we just don't do."

"Like what?" Camilla stared at him accusingly. "What exactly is it that I'm not allowed to do anymore? I suppose you're going to tell me that I can't even pop over to Tetbury to get a packet of fags from Mr Ali?"

"Good heavens, no. The way it's done is that you ring down to Sir Alan, and he'll tell the footman on duty, and he'll tell the under-footman, and he'll make the arrangements, and then sometime tomorrow afternoon you'll get your cigarettes, and anything else you want. D'you see? It has to be like that. It's a protocol thingie."

Camilla's head reeled at the thought of how changed her life was going to be.

"You see," her husband went on, "you're now one of us..."

"HERE's one of us." Camilla read the scrawled note which accompanied a photograph of four women on horseback, riding under a cloudless, azure sky through the olive groves of the Tuscany campagna.

How sweet of her old friend Penny Rumpole to send this treasured memento of the unforgettable girls-only holiday they had enjoyed together the previous summer.

Camilla took the delightful snapshot over to the window to look at it more closely in the light.

Penny, on her fiery chestnut stallion, Berlusconi. Laetitia Starborgling-Cohen, on the little piebald, Caravaggio. And dear Clarissa Plunkett-Green, coming up fast behind on her fat but frisky grey, Pavarotti.

What fun they'd all had on those glorious sunlit days, as they galloped up the valley to the picturesque little hilltop town of Montepythone. There, in its ancient church, they had all been enthralled by the famous quattrocento frescoes by Piero di Moroni, showing the temptations of San Andrea di Brillo at the hands of a dusky maiden sent by the devil to torment the saint in his cell.

And in the evening, what larks they had enjoyed, sitting in the little piazza under gaily-coloured parasols, swigging back bottle after bottle of the heady local Valpollitoynbi wine and gossiping good-naturedly about their friends back in England.

"Poor old Priscilla, Rodney's left her again for that gay personal trainer he met at the Vanderbilt... Oliver, haven't you heard, he's back in the Priory... Philippa's Jamie's been sacked from Eton for running a cocaine ring... that's a bit tough, just before his 'A' Levels..."

And, to top it all, who should have swept them all up and invited them to stay in his nearby palazzo but the dashing Count Lazio di Lavazza himself.

Camilla would never forget that night, as they all swam in his marble pool under the silvery light of a Tuscan moon...

"What have you got there, Cammers?"

Charles was looking over her shoulder at the photo.

"Who are all those funny-looking women?" he asked.

"It's our girls' holiday last year in Italy," she explained. "It was such a laugh that we're going again this June."

"Not this year, darling. Haven't you looked in the diary? In June we're opening a new library in the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands, and after that we've got to light the flame at the Pacific Games in Samosa, and then to the anti-windfarm conference in Balti, and then..."

"You mean, there's no holiday this year?" Camilla asked, her heart sinking.

"No, no, far from it, we've got two months at Balmoral with mater and pater. It'll be such fun, you know, grouse-shooting, salmon-fishing every day, the Highland Games at Rorybremner – it beats going to Italy any day."

Charles moved over to his favourite armchair by the fire to read the freshly-ironed copy of the Daily Telegraph that had just been brought in by Sir Alan Fitztightly.

Its headline proclaimed *'Princess Di Fountain Closed Due To Wrong Kind Of Mud'*.

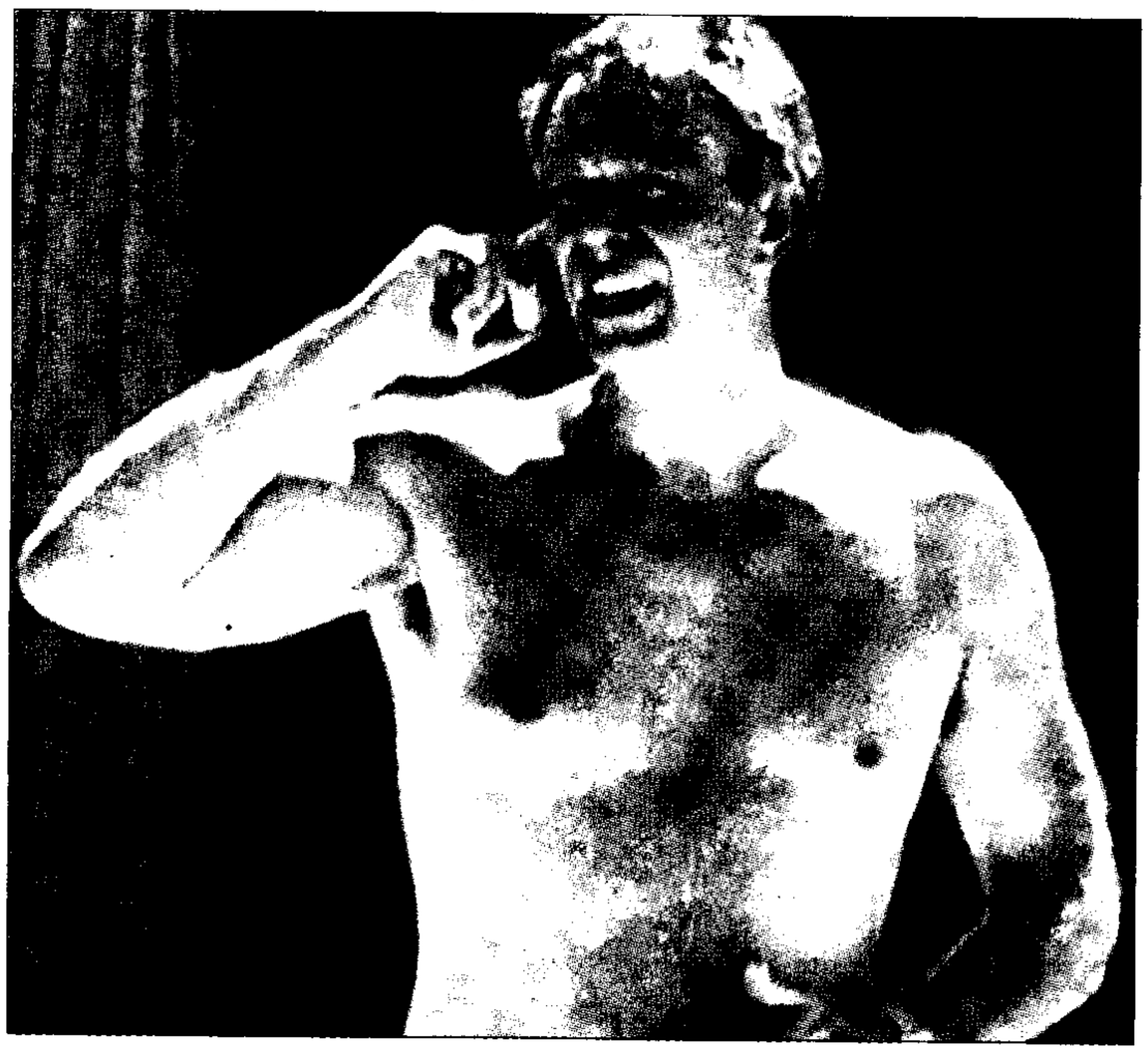
As Camilla read it from across the room, she was overcome by a terrible sense of doom. The leaded drawing room windows began to look ominously like prison bars...

(To be continued)

© *Sylvie Krin, the Easyjet Easyread Collection 2005*

THE Sun
Friday, May 13, 2005

EXCLUSIVE



'I'M AT IT ALL THE TIME! Says PM

By TREVOR BEARD
Chief Political Editor

IN AN astonishingly frank exclusive interview with the Sun newspaper, Tony Blair yesterday boasted that he does it "five times a night".

As his wife Cherie giggled in the background, Britain's longest-serving Labour premier went on, "I can do it any time I like, and then do it again."

It is rare for a prime minister to admit so openly to his passion for lying.

But Tony Blair makes no bones about it. "I'm a normal guy, look, I like lying. I don't see anything to be ashamed of."

Lies Matters

At this point, wife Cherie chipped in with a saucy comment of her own. "Size matters," she said, "and when it comes to a good lie, the bigger the better, I say.

"And I don't mind telling you that Tony's are whoppers!"

The happy couple then cuddled up to each other, as if to prove Tony's claim that his health problems have not impaired his ability to "make it up" at all times of the day or night.

Tony then told us the moving story of how the late Pope had personally insisted on flying to Chequers to bless Tony and Cherie's marriage on their 25th wedding anniversary.

General Erection

"No, he didn't," Cherie butted in. "You're at it again, you naughty boy! Oo-er, there's no stopping you, is there, once you get going?"

Feeling that I was one too many for the party, I tiptoed towards the door and left the two of them lying contentedly together.

© The Rupert Murdoch 'Re-elect Tony' Campaign 2005.

Advertisement

Yes, it's NEW **ASBO Barbie™**

Play long into the night and disturb your neighbours in the early hours with the new all-action Barbie Doll from Hell.

Asbo Barbie comes complete with

- Scraped-back Hair
- Horrible Tracksuit
- Nasty Hoop Earrings
- Tattoos
- Bottle of Vodka
- List of convictions for assault

Pull Barbie's string and listen to her say:

*"F*** off, you w**er, I'm gonna torch your house"*

Also available ASBO KEN! Together you can make Ken and Barbie drive all the other dolls out of the dolls house.

Hours of community service (surely "fun"? Ed.)

NORTHERN IRELAND GLOOM

VE DAY – ANNIVERSARY SOUVENIR

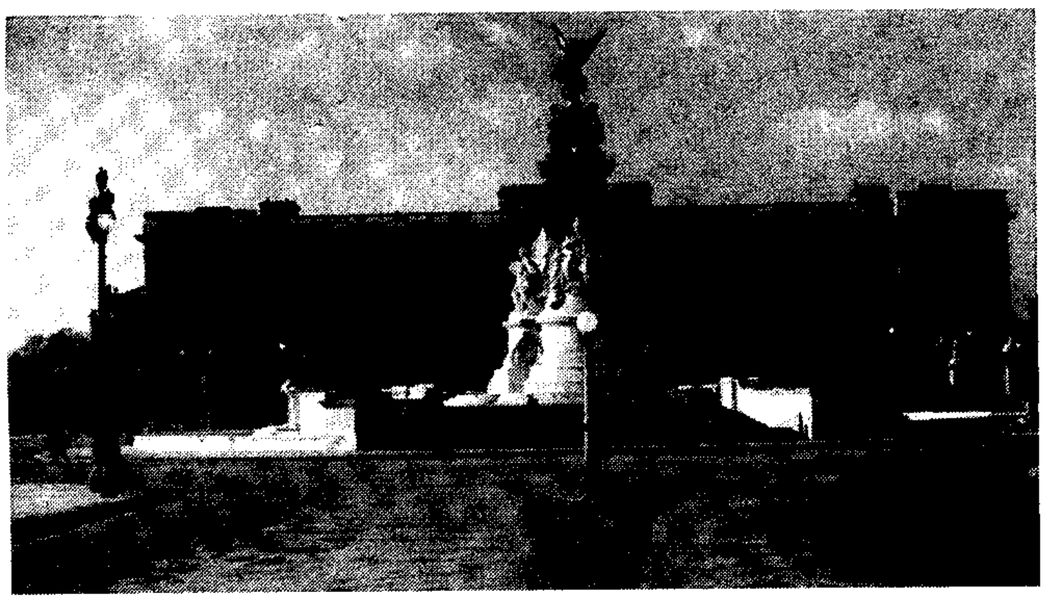
The Daily Private Eye

MAY 6 2005 PRICE 12/6½

VICTORY!!!

NATION FAILS TO CELEBRATE AS WAR PREMIER IS NOT CHEERED BY MILLIONS

NO ONE ORGANISES STREET PARTIES IN SPONTANEOUS OUTBURST OF APATHY



No crowd filled the Mall yesterday to acclaim moment of victory

"Victory is ours!" a triumphant Prime Minister told the nation last night, but since everyone had long since gone to bed, no one was listening.

After five long weeks of gruelling political warfare, the last shots had been fired and the whole nation breathed a collective sigh of relief.

NEW ERA YAWNS

In Piccadilly Circus, at the heart of London's West End, an eerie silence greeted the historic news.

From Eros the streets in all directions were deserted. A lone taxi-driver, Sid Montgomery-Massingberd said, "I've never known nothing like this. I blame Red Ken and his congestion charge."

The story was the same across the nation. Old-age pensioners slept openly in their beds, as teenagers danced the night away under the influence of Class A drugs.

HOW WE SUFFERED

"It's over at last," said a typical East End housewife, Mrs Sonali Onanugu. "Now we can get on peacefully with our lives, without dreading round-the-clock bombardment of leaflets, loudspeakers and George Galloway coming to the door telling us that the Koran is his favourite bedside reading."

Meanwhile huge crowds packed into the nearby Ferret and Trombone (formerly the Duke of Cambridge), cheering wildly as they watched the Champions' League Semi-final.

QUEEN RECEIVES HISTORIC TELEGRAM

Her Majesty the Queen last night personally received an historic telegram from her prime minister.

"I am proud to report to your Majesty that I have secured a complete and crushing victory over all our opponents. I therefore have the honour to be prime minister of this country, and would like to invite you to stay on as Queen for the next five years.

God Save Myself!

Winstony Blairchill

P.S. No need for you to come out on the palace balcony. Cherie and I will do that one.

Victory in Election special

GLENDA SLAGG

THE FORCES' SWEETHEART

(but you won't have to *force* her!! Geddit?!!)

■ **SO Princess Pushy is pushing off!?!! Or so she says! Just because Britain is a boring country with no one going a-huntin' any more!?!? If that's how you feel, Ma'am, may I be the first to wish you good riddance!?!? Or should that be 'Auf Wiedersehen', as you will no doubt be heading back to your native Germany!?!? What a Nazi piece of work!?!? Geddit?!**

■ HATS OFF to Princess Michael – the glamorous Royal who has got the guts to say that Britain has gone to the dogs because we can't hunt with them any more?!?! Geddit!?! But don't go yet, Your Highness – we need someone to stand up and speak for Germany!?!? *(Surely 'England'? Ed.)* Tally-ho, Ma'am!?!?

■ *THREE CHEERS for Alicia Monkton – she's Rod Liddle's new squeeze, stoopid!?! At last someone has shown up Romeo Rod for the no-good love-rat that he is?!? No offence, Mr Sextator, but a Liddle of you goes a long way!?!?*

■ SO HARRY'S joined the Army!?! Get fell in, Your Royal Drunkenness, and let's be 'aving you, you 'orrible little prince!?! Left right, left right, left right – and not down to the pub!?!

■ HERE they are – Your Post-Election Pin-Ups:

● **Bob Marshall-Andrews** – The Medway's Mr Munchy!? Your majority may be tiny, but I'll sort that out for you!?!? Geddit?!?

● **Nicholas Soames** – the Tories' Front Bench Fatso!?! OK, so you're retiring! How about a long lunch round at my place?!? Geddit?!?

● **Robert Kilroy-Silk** – crazy name, crazy party!?!

Byeeee!!!

THE INDEPENDENT

The Vanishing Newspapers of Britain

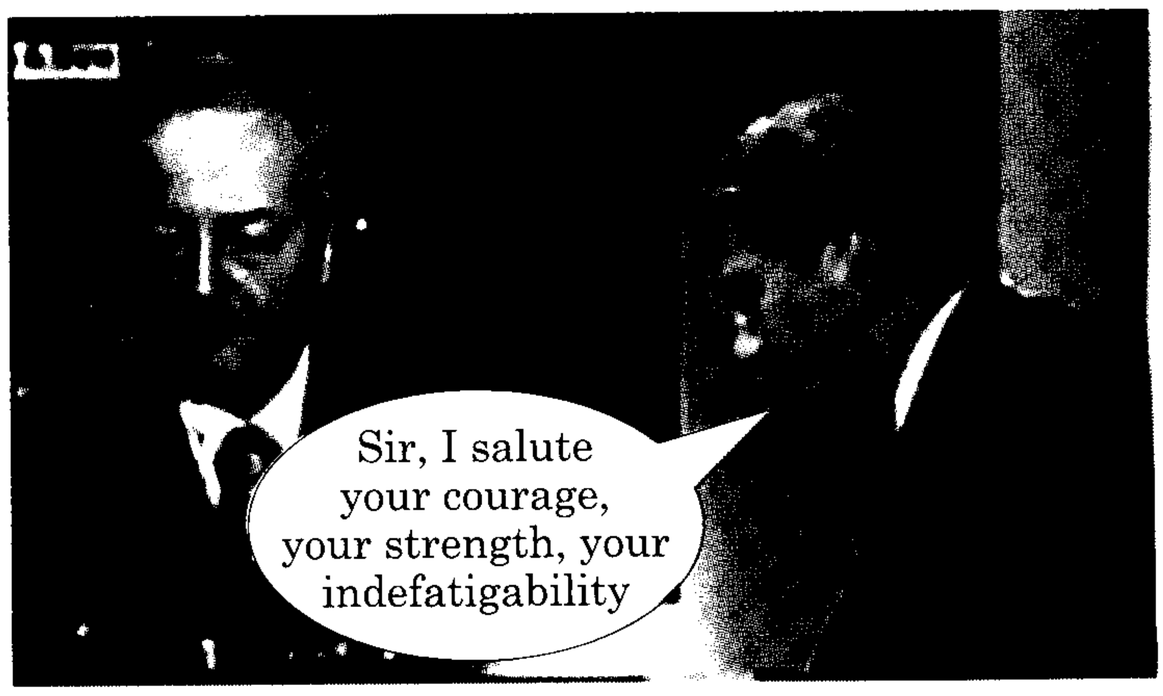
ON THE morning after the General Election and the anniversary of VE Day, there is only one possible story to put on the front page – the threat to some of Britain's rarest newspapers *(surely 'flowers'? Ed).*

Recent devastating research shows that the two most at risk papers are the seldom spotted Independent *(Indius Tediosus)* and the even rarer Never-Spotted Independent on Sunday *(Indius sabbaticus narcoleptus).*

Wildlife expert, Dr Simon Kelner, said that the Indius "Can only nowadays be seen in three remote areas of Britain – a newsagent in Dumfries, a doctor's waiting room in Aberystwyth and Mr Kelner's own home.

"If it goes on at this rate," he said, "one of the great glories of British newspaper life could be lost for ever."

WHAT PAXMAN SHOULD HAVE SAID



Advertisement

NEW FROM GNOME!

From the makers of the Peeing Paula

The WEEPING CHARLIE

TO MARK the unique historic event of Charlie Dimmock being officially washed up, Gnome Heritage plc has commissioned an elegant water feature by world-famous sculptor Michelangelo di Heathi. This wonderful souvenir will delight you and your loved ones for years to come as a poignant memory of one of Britain's premier television gardening celebrities.

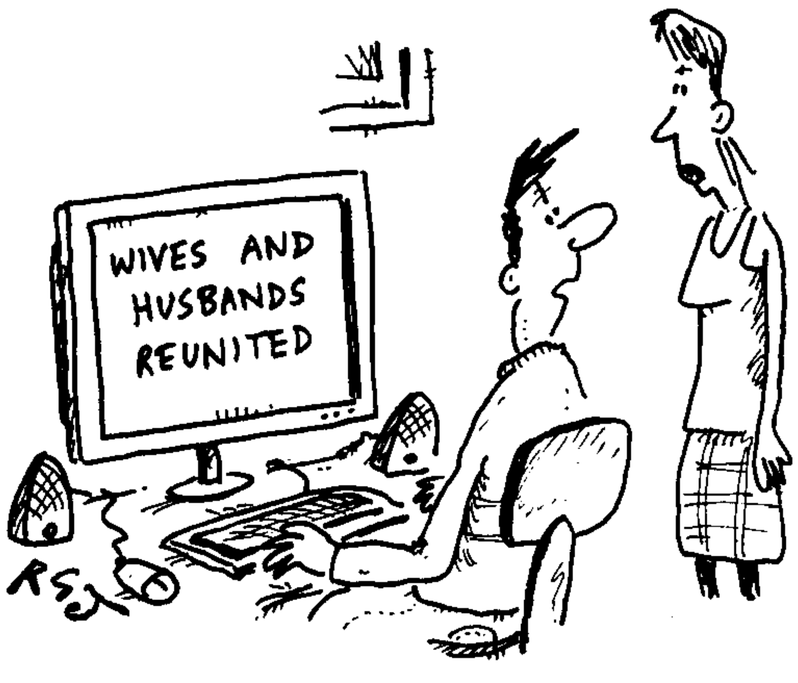
THE EYE SAYS

GIVE SAD CHARLIE A JOB!

WHAT could be more tragic than the sight of the nation's former favourite gardener with nothing to do for the foreseeable future?

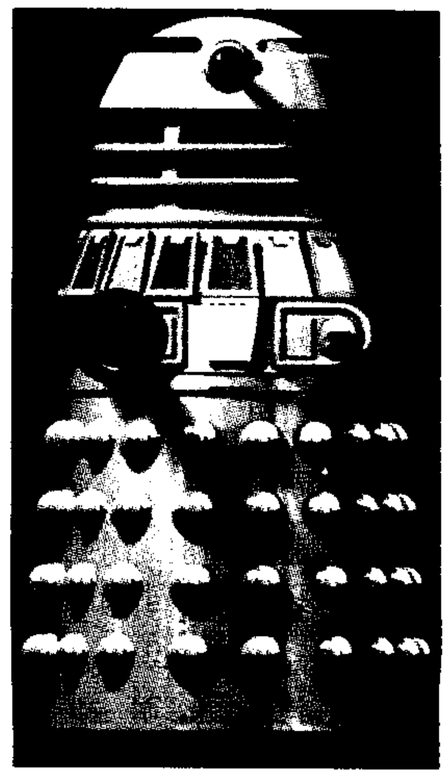
Charlie used to be the name on everyone's lips when it came to ornamental ponds and novelty ha-has. But then suddenly poor Charlie fell out of fashion and his long-term project, to be King of England, was cruelly axed. Who cares that his only real talent was showing off his assets – ie, an enormous pair of ears? Not us!

We love Charlie Dimwit, so give him a job, your Majesty!



"It's a new website for all the couples who've split up over 'Friends Reunited'"

SCI-FI FANS FURIOUS AT NEW-LOOK DALEK



by Our Television Staff **Phil Airtime**

OUTRAGED traditionalists today launched angry protests at the recent depiction of the last remaining Dalek.

The Dalek (John Birt), instead of appearing as a cold-hearted robot who wanted to destroy everything, was portrayed as a sensitive, emotional and almost human creature for whom we were invited to feel sorry. Said one angry viewer, Mrs Birt from Wandsworth, "It's appalling. All that soppy stuff with the Dalek trapped in 10 Downing Street and falling in love with the female sidekick [Eithne Asbo] made me sick."

Sexterminate

She continued, "We all know what Daleks are like. They are callous, insensitive, computing machines with no redeeming features whatsoever. They are total shits who *(continued p. 94)*

POLLY FILLER

WHEN you read the heart-rending list which the brave cancer victim left her husband didn't you think of just one thing?

How similar it was to the list in my best-selling book *Mummy For Old Rope* (Pearson and Alison £7.99)?

It's incredible – years before this woman thought of it, I had already come up with the idea of a tragic mummy making a list for her useless partner in the event of her dying.

Millions of women all over the world wrote to me, emailed me and texted me to say, "Polly, we identify totally with your wonderful character Jilly Fuller. We too have lovely toddlers and useless partners who put the toast in the washing machine and the socks in the microwave(!!), but never before has anyone written so movingly as you about the perils of modern motherhood."

The rest is, of course, history. My book became an international best-seller and I am now writing a sequel (*More Mummy For Even Less Old Rope*, Pearson and Puffpiece £17.99) to include some of **your** stories – yes, you, the unsung little women, who juggle your lives and careers to keep the whole mad, male world going round!

So, anyway, back to brave whatshername and her list – I'm sure that what she would really like to have known is what was the advice in my heartbreaking guide. So here it is, as it appeared in *Mummy For Old Rope* (Pearson and Shameless £7.99).

"In the unimaginable event of something happening to me, the Useless Simon is to ensure that:

1) There are plenty of copies of my book in the shops.

2) Nicole Kidman plays Polly Filler in the movie.

3) The au-pair looks after toddler Charlie as usual."

You can cry your eyes out now – it's OK!

© Polly Filler.

DIARY

POLLY TOYNBEE'S SUMMER PICNIC

You have to pinch yourself, you really do. You lay on a generous, must-have, picnic for ordinary people and they show no gratitude whatsoever. Dismay and despair are the only natural emotions for today's picnic-provider – roughly 56% dismay and 44% despair.

What is wrong with everyone today? Why is a prolonged sigh of exasperation the only fit reaction to the modern guest?

Let's start at the beginning. Thoughtfully, I had sought to provide a picnic for an invited cross-section of my acquaintances. It was, I was good enough to inform them, a celebration of the Labour victory, combined with a commemorative event for the have-nots in our society, who would be with us in spirit.

It was also a day of sympathy for all those alive today whose mothers were prevented, for whatever reason, from aborting them.

I chose the perfect location for my "fun" picnic – though why picnics should be so remorselessly associated with such a puerile notion of human entertainment is frankly beyond me.

I carefully chose somewhere representative – 23% grassy yet 47% modern, with the remaining 30% equally divided between the industrial and the rural.

Since you ask, it was in the centre of an important roundabout on the northern outskirts of Hatfield, a key marginal.

It was left to me to unpack the two hampers. The men, being men, sat around doing nothing. Needless to say, the women had their hands full trying to prevent their irresponsible underage offspring running into the busy traffic (congestion on the roundabout up a staggering 29% in just three years, according to my sources).

"Bread and butter, anyone?" I said, showing them the main course.

"What's the choice?" asked an ungrateful child.

"Let's hear no more about 'choice'," I rebutted. "You can have bread and butter, or just bread, or just butter. In a civilised society, that's far too much choice as it is."

"Anything to drink?" asked a parent, who, like 89% of today's bloated citizens, should have known better.

"There's as much water as you could possibly want," I said. Looking around at the picnickers, I was continually disappointed by the ill-suppressed state of dissatisfaction on their ignorant, selfish faces. Did they not know that, in some parts of Africa, 51% of the population would be 93% grateful to be invited for a glass of water and a nice piece of bread and butter on a highly-regarded roundabout on the northern outskirts of Hatfield? Hosting a picnic in this pampered day and age is indeed a thankless task.

Instead, we have created for ourselves a have-it-all, me-me-me, grumble-grumble-grumble society in which picnickers who would once have been delighted to eat a decent bit of grass and perhaps the odd dandelion now turn up their pampered toffee-noses at a delicious bit of bread-and-butter. Sitting here on the roundabout in Hatfield, it suddenly strikes you what Labour is up against: a nation of sour and selfish consumers, pumped full of things they would be better off without.

It's not just the summer when this hellish greed breaks out. You can witness it at any time of the year. In winter, any reasonable person would wish to see that pernicious obese and mendacious fatcat Santa Claus banned from foisting squalid consumer durables on gullible children – and Easter exists as nothing more than an opportunity for hollow chocolate eggs to be foisted ruthlessly upon equally saccharine "kiddies".

For what it's worth, my own Christmas – an outdated festival at the best of times, without a genuinely radical bone in its decrepit body – is spent watching old Fawlty Towers videos. They help me grapple with the problems faced by the dispossessed middle-aged who wish to make a living within the catering sector in the post-colonial era. That people can laugh at the emotional traumas and economic dilemmas of Basil and Sybil Fawlty, devoid of any historical perspective on the genuine problems faced by the service industries in 20th century Britain tells us a lot about the depth of ignorance residing in this country today.

It's high time people grew up and realised that happiness has nothing to do with enjoying yourself. Statistically speaking, in countries where no-one enjoys themselves – the Antarctic and northern parts of Siberia spring to mind – people live infinitely happier lives. Not for them the easy hand-me-down pleasures of smiling or laughing: like all sensible adults they know that true enjoyment can only be derived from the scowl and the nag.

I would not agree with Alexander Solzhynitsyn on everything – he remains disgracefully tight-lipped on the subject of increasing tax credits for single-parent families in inner-cities, for instance – but his portrait of the Gulag should in many ways act as a role-model for Britain 2005, with its welcome absence of that awful nudge-nudge male-based 'humour' and 'bonhomie' that so corrupts our own political system.

I was mentioning this while handing around the pudding – plain digestive biscuits, one per adult, quarter per child – at my picnic celebrations last week. At that moment, a one-legged man who should have known better (93% of all Britons are in this category, a personal survey proves conclusively) suggested a typically witless "game" of "Blind Man's Buff".

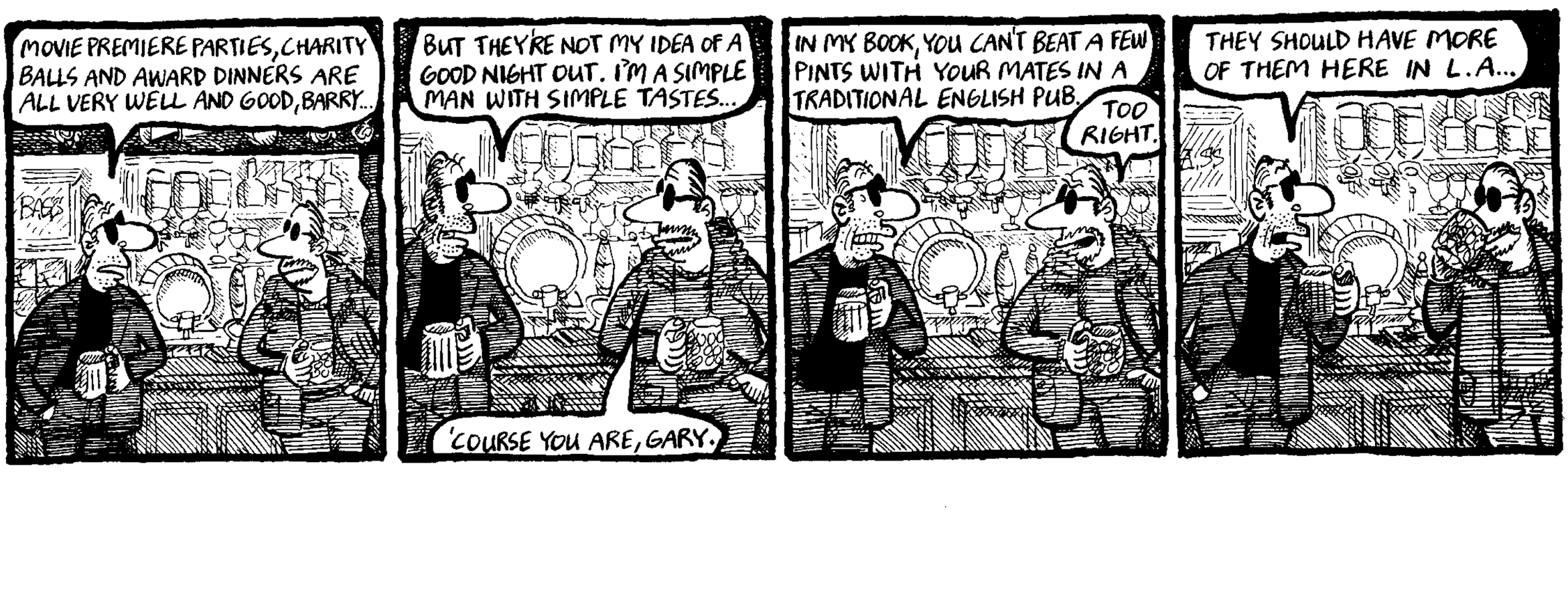
Men just don't get it, do they? "Being blind isn't just a game, you know," I informed him. Then an old man suggested "Grandmother's Footsteps". What a hurtful, irresponsible suggestion! Sometimes, I despair of humanity! You spend your life striving for equality for the elderly and the disabled, only to have it all undone by gormless old one-legged idiots!

So I packed the food away, gave a brief but wide-ranging talk to my guests on the need for equality among picnickers and hailed a bus without further ado. I have always been a firm believer in public transport, so I was horrified to be informed by my (male!) driver that he could only drop me at the end of my road, rather than outside my own front door. This is how women are still treated in 21st century Britain. It is a monstrous social injustice which Gordon Brown must address as soon as he becomes PM, or he will, I fear, lose the goodwill of all right-thinking people.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


MOVIE PREMIERE PARTIES, CHARITY BALLS AND AWARD DINNERS ARE ALL VERY WELL AND GOOD, BARRY...
BAGS
BUT THEY'RE NOT MY IDEA OF A GOOD NIGHT OUT. I'M A SIMPLE MAN WITH SIMPLE TASTES...
'COURSE YOU ARE, GARY.
IN MY BOOK, YOU CAN'T BEAT A FEW PINTS WITH YOUR MATES IN A TRADITIONAL ENGLISH PUB.
TOO RIGHT.
THEY SHOULD HAVE MORE OF THEM HERE IN L.A...

Literary Review

Unclear Ames

Gilead

Marilynne Robinson

(Virago, £14.99)

AT ONE point in this saga about three generations of Midwestern preachers the narrator, tramping around the drought-ridden Kansas prairie with his father in search of his grandfather's grave, is offered a bowl of cornmeal mush by a charitable farming lady. This homely dish is an apt metaphor for the book as a whole, a hash of corn served up with preaching and prayers: "homily grits" as it were.

The book comes highly praised, and indeed prized: it has won the Pulitzer and National Book Award, while Robinson's only previous novel, *Housekeeping*, published back in 1981, was also nominated for the Pulitzer and won the PEN/Faulkner award. But after 24 years, was *Gilead* worth the wait? Is it really that good?

This novel purports to be a letter written by the 76-year-old Reverend John Ames, who knows he is dying, as a testament to his seven-year-old son (the product of the preacher's late second marriage). Ames was born in 1880 so the time of writing is the mid-1950s. But the subject matter stretches back to the civil war when the issues that divided a nation also divided this family. His abolitionist grandfather saw a vision of Christ enslaved in chains and, brandishing his pistol from the pulpit, "preached young men into the war". His father, horrified, turned pacifist and joined the Quakers. The rift between father and son is mirrored in other family rifts and separations, over issues of faith and morality, colour and class.

Though the author is a woman, she has given her female characters a raw deal. They appear only in a supporting capacity, as wives or mistresses whose illness, age, ignorance, poverty or skin colour can help to illustrate the character and behaviour of the men who are involved with them.

There is precious little in the way of story. A family saga stretching from before the civil war to after the Second World War should not be wholly devoid of incident, one would have thought; and yet on finishing the book one tries in vain to recollect more than a handful of actual events. The reverend's pistol appears, disappears, reappears, and may on one occasion have been shot in anger, or at any rate war. A church catches or is set on fire. A secret tunnel collapses, but there are no casualties. There's a certain amount of begetting, but no sex would appear to have been involved. Death looms, but deals with its victims offstage. The civil war passes in a couple of skirmishes and the two world wars get barely a mention. Gilead, the eponymous small town in Iowa, seems to have been remarkably well preserved from anything approaching real life over the course of an entire century.

Is there more to this than meets the eye? Perhaps. Despite rounding off most of his observations with the words "And that's a fact", Ames is sometimes an unreliable narrator. He is certainly self-deceiving. But the unpacking of the occasional self-deception does not in itself amount to an eye-popping revelation, nor keep you turning the page.

The prose, in character with the voice of its narrator, is plain and simple and therefore mercifully free of the irritating "style" which afflicts so many of the masculine competitors in the Great American Novel stakes. But the rigid authenticity of the narrator's voice means that the prose is afflicted instead with a kind of pompous biblical windiness, a reiterative, smug, sermonising, self-justifying drone.

There are constant references to Scripture. Ames and his father are "like Abraham and Isaac on the way to Mount Moriah". Ames tells his son that "your mother has always struck me as someone with whom the Lord might have chosen to spend some part of His mortal time." Proverbs are bandied about: "Behold how much wood is kindled by how small a fire, and the tongue is a fire."

Much of the handed-down wisdom is of staggering banality: "Sorrow seems to me to be a great part of the substance of human life." Then again, "our human circumstance creates in us a radically limited and peculiar notion of what existence is."

Ultimately the baffling thing is not that this anodyne slice of small town nostalgia should have its admirers, but that there should be so many of them, and that prize committees should have thought it worthy of two of America's most prestigious literary awards.

The crucial word here is "worthy". The issues over which it agonises are, by chance or design, thoroughly topical. America is once again divided against itself over the moral issues of a war of liberation. The biblical references will obviously mean a great deal more in a country whose population is so largely and unembarrassedly religious. This is particularly so in the Mid-west, where the novel is set, as opposed to the liberal fringe along the east and west coasts. While British and European critics may regard the novel's religious content as unfashionable, this is very much an outsider's view. To its home audience it's as comforting and familiar as, well, as that emblematic cornmeal hash.

FIRST DRAFTS
Gwendolen
I am glad to say I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.
Cecily
Whatever.
Pearsall.

Oscar Wilde

Books & Bookmen

■ THERE were a lot of baffled looks at the trade Nibbies in Glasgow. Biggest mystery of the night was how Orion pipped Random House Group for Publisher of the Year award.

The word is that Orion's submission impressed the judges with what a well-run company it is, but purely in publishing terms the fact is Random House stormed it in 2004. It managed an astonishing 81 books on the *Sunday Times* best-seller lists, including the three blockbusters of the year: *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon and *A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson.

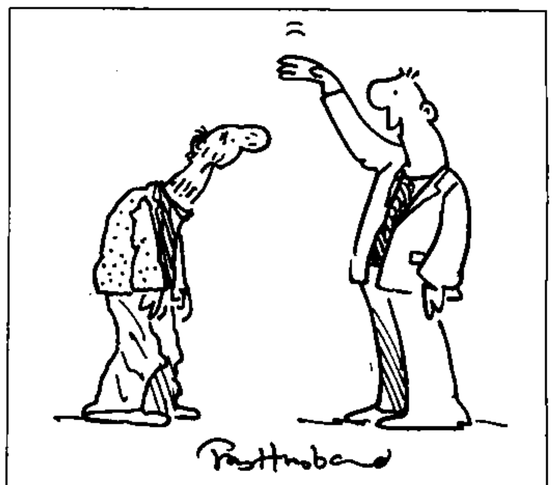
In comparison Orion did just about all right. One guest at the ceremony, surveying the crestfallen faces on the Random House Group tables, including that of ceo Gail Rebuck, commented: "They must be wondering what they have to do to win".

'Bookworm'

Warballs

● "Thursday 5 May, 4-5.30pm: 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', Dr Jasbir Puar, Rutgers University, USA. This paper will consider the production of intersectional queerness in the context of the war on terror and elaborates upon Deleuzian notions of assemblage and affect as alternatives to queer identities. Dr Puar is Assistant Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University. She works on queer globalisations, South Asian diasporas, gay and lesbian tourism, and sexual scripts of terrorism." – Notice of lecture at Manchester University.

● "In a post-9/11 world, it's become harder to get by on persona and gimmickry; music listeners want something meatier and less icily cool now. Beck, Moby and Garbage, however, are growing into this new uncertain era along with their listeners." – MSN.com music review.



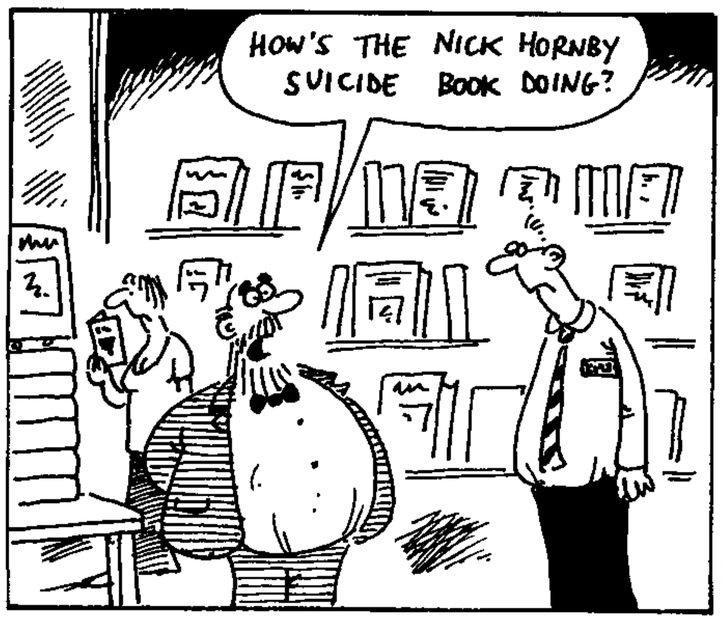
"I remember you when you were this high"

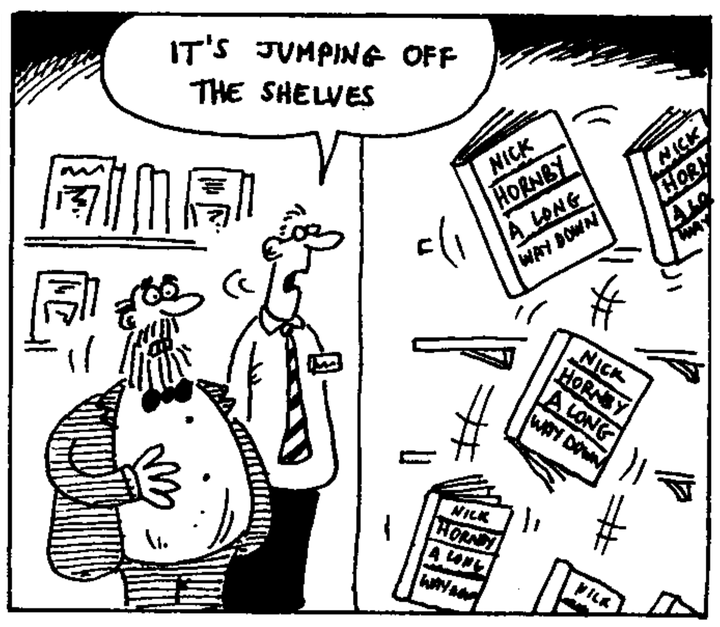
LUVVIES

I do understand why people get so excited about seeing celebrities. I do, too. It's normal. You are magnified on television. So I have a theory that I use. I look at it as my spiritual work on the planet when people stop and get excited to see me or whatever. It's in those moments that I get called upon to be my best self and to give something back and respond with love and openness and gratefulness.

MARCIA CROSS (Desperate Housewives' star) ***The Times***

Submitted by M.R. Pitwood.





Pseuds Corner

When a kind of conceptual order encounters a medium, what are the interzonal crepuscular manifestations of that encounter? The starting point for the quartet was such a question.

JAMES DILLON, programme notes for an Arditti Quartet performance of his 'String Quartet No. 3', Wigmore Hall

But Irish modernity is not only qualified by issues of internal versus external motivation: for Cleary, its unique consistency resists alignment with broader European metanarratives of progress. The anomalous position of Ireland – call it strange, enigmatic, deficient, eccentric – has positioned Irish society as "an uncanny site of the pre-modern or non-modern', a sublime location of Romantic indulgence and a philosophical laboratory for the interrogation of the "modern" itself. *[continues for some while]*

EVE PATTEN, review of Cleary and Connolly, The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture, *Irish Times*

In my family we judge strength of character by deciding whether we would go tiger-hunting with them.

MARY-ANN SIEGHART
'Quote Unquote', Radio Four

Pseuds Educational

They [students] should recognise the grammatical compression evident in certain types of data, brought about by economies of time or space and realised through ellipsis and recently established conventions. They should also recognise that in some texts graphology is not so important per se as for its structural and interactive implications; and in relation to pragmatics they should be aware of the specific shared cultural knowledge necessary to using a medium (i.e. the collusive aspect), and ultimately be able to explain why particular language choices have been made.

'Language and Technology' section of the AQA 'A' level specification for English Language, relating to text messaging

Pseuds Corporate

Dedicated trained staff are employed as salt testers and flavour attendants.
These people organoleptically assess the product on an hourly basis to determine the acceptability of the flavour level.

KP Foods responds to a complaint about Real McCoys Potato Chips

CONTRIBUTORS: Angus Meryon, Rick Jacobs, Adrian Mannering, R.M. Carey, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER

SHELL MAKES A KILLING

"IT IS clear that we had failures in our systems and we feel 100 percent responsible for the deaths of these men," admitted Shell's production director.

The company executive was speaking after a Scottish court last month imposed a fine of £900,000 for the "catalogue of failures" that led to the deaths of two employees through gas inhalation on one of Shell's North Sea rigs.

Five months before the incident, union officials had visited the health and safety executive (HSE) in Aberdeen to raise concerns about maintenance and other safety issues in the Brent field, including on the Brent Bravo rig (pictured below) where the tragedy occurred. No serious action was taken.

Unions insist that episodes such as this – and the 235 workplace deaths in Britain last year alone – cry out for tougher rules on corporate killing of the sort that "new" Labour has been promising but not delivering since 1997.

Eventually, after several false starts, a draft corporate manslaughter bill was published by the home office shortly before the election was called. Whether this makes it on to the statute books in the next parliament is anybody's guess, but even if it does there will be no criminal convictions for individual directors. The version already issued makes clear that only companies will be capable of corporate killing, which means simply fines to be paid by shareholders and no prospect of prison for reckless directors. All the unions oppose this exemption from prosecution

for those in the boardroom as it leaves insufficient incentive for them to make sure that, unlike Shell's, their companies' safety policies are up to scratch.

In Scotland, under whose jurisdiction most rig workers operate, the prospects for action are even worse. The Scottish Executive, perhaps fearful of the reaction from hugely influential multinationals like Shell, has said it will await the outcome of the English legislation (which, like previous attempts, could yet be derailed) and in the meantime will ask an as yet unnamed "panel of experts" to look at the issue. All of which kicks corporate killing legislation that might protect oil rig and other workers north of the border into the long grass for at least another couple of years.

The sheriff delivering the sentence against Shell expressed the hope that its severity would "act as a marker" to prevent similar tragedies. The next day Shell announced yet another enormous rise in profits, this time up 28 percent to £3bn in the first three months of the year. This makes the £900,000 for two deaths equivalent to about 50 minutes worth of profits.

REBUILDING IRAQ

False profit

AS HE sets about trying to rebuild the shattered Iraqi economy, new prime minister Ibrahim al-Jafaari (pictured right) may have been encouraged to hear that one of George Bush's favourite consultancy firms is already on the case.

In September last year the US government awarded BearingPoint (formerly part of accountancy giant KPMG) a $20m contract "to develop and implement international economic practices aimed at improving economic governance in Iraq and developing a policy-enabling environment for private sector-led growth".

The deal gives the firm huge influence over areas ranging from monetary policy to housing reforms, and demands that it "foster private sector participation" in the country's electricity industry.

Alas, documents now filed with US regulators suggest that BearingPoint isn't in the best position to give lessons to anyone on economic governance. The firm has been forced to withdraw the accounts it filed for 2003 and the first nine months of 2004 due to "material weaknesses and significant deficiencies in our internal control over financial reporting", which resulted in vastly over-stated profits.

As a consequence, BearingPoint won't be able to file its 2004 accounts on time, will record losses despite winning enormous public contracts and expects an equivocal opinion from its auditors as to whether it is even a going concern – all of which has unsurprisingly prompted an investigation by the regulators.

So much for "economic governance", courtesy of Uncle Sam.

PRECISION BOMBING

Snafu what a scorcher

THEY might be flying multi-billion dollar state-of-the-art military aircraft, but if flight crews don't know right from left or metres from feet, pity the people on the ground.

Two crew members flying a B2 stealth aircraft returned to the US from a bombing exercise in the UK last month having to explain how they missed their static target by nearly 1,000ft.

"Fury 1" had flown to Holbeach bombing range non-stop from Whiteman air force base in Missouri as part of a training mission and was supposed to have destroyed an orange boat moored on mud flats at the Lincolnshire range. Before take-off, however, the crew were instructed to offset their targeting by 300ft to the right into some mud flats as a direct hit would apparently have resulted in a huge and potentially dangerous fragmentation area.

Instead, the crew entered an offset of some 300 *metres* to the *left* and dropped two bombs on land well off target.

An MoD spokesman confirmed that the B2s were using the range for target practice but said he could not comment on the success or otherwise of the mission. "But that is the whole point of training and practice. You learn the lessons and get it right."

As one crew member of "Fury 1" was recorded saying to the RAF traffic controller: "Sir, we got a long trip to get our story straight on that one."

In the Back continues overleaf

ARMS SALES

Business as usual

LABOUR tried to woo voters opposed to the invasion of Iraq with a promise of more controls over arms sales. But papers uncovered by *Private Eye* suggest the drive to sell arms abroad will continue as before.

Using the freedom of information act, the *Eye* asked to see the latest copy of the Defence Export Sales Organisation's (DESO) *Strategic Marketing Plan*. This confirmed that the previous Labour government encouraged officials to view dangerous regional conflicts as a mere "market backcloth" to promote arms sales.

DESO, which has a £15m budget dedicated to promoting arms sales, has a list of "priority markets" where the UK should be hustling for business. One such is India, described in the 2002 report as being in a "region that is politically and militarily volatile". Despite all the listed dangers – including nuclear brinkmanship with Pakistan, continuing tension over Kashmir and threats from China – these are seen as a golden opportunity for UK arms firms. DESO identifies one of India's key markets as trainer/light attack aircraft; and the government has backed the sale to India of BAE Hawk jets. These are normally described as "training" planes, and no mention is made of their "attack" ability.

DESO was also enthusiastic about the prospects in Kazakhstan, noting the "rising Islamic militancy in the region". It went on: "Kazakhstan is looking to the west to develop economic and political partnerships, a policy which irritates the Russians." Another plus was that Kazakhstan will be "the third largest uranium producer in the world", attracting the keen interest of the US. No space, alas, to mention Kazakhstan's authoritarian rule or imprisonment of opposition leaders. Indeed, DESO made no mention at all of human rights issues in any of its country profiles.

The biggest group of "priority markets" of course is in the Middle East, and includes Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar. DESO called for government and army backing for arms sales here, including visits by ministers and military chiefs. "Beginning Saudi army officer training in the UK" is, apparently, the key to selling the Saudis British weapons.

As well as acting as weapons salesman abroad, DESO wants the British army to set an example by buying the kit that exporters want to sell. (Hence, when BAE was trying to flog Hawks to India, the RAF was pressurised into buying them too even though its officers preferred rival planes.)

Happily, the DESO marketing plan even saw a silver lining to the cloud produced by the fallout from September 11. "The new threat posed by asymmetric warfare has created global interest in the procurement of systems for intelligence collection and surveillance."

Though the release of the DESO report under freedom of information legislation is a step forward from 1998, when Labour refused to let MPs see it, some parts remain secret. Anything to do with the massive Al Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia was blacked out because "public interest in disclosure of this information is outweighed by the risk this could pose to the Al Yamamah programme."

Quiet, please

ARMS MAKERS love to pretend their kit is a harmless force for good in the world. Just consider BAE Systems' claim to be "innovating for a safer world" and Thales' boast of "securing your future".

But EDO, which makes bomb racks and weapons interfacing systems, went one step further earlier this year when it threatened to sue internet news site Indymedia for daring to suggest that the firm might be "complicit in the deaths of innocent people".

A letter, sent through solicitors Reynolds Porter Chamberlain (who have since stopped representing EDO), also took exception to claims that the firm was a "warmonger" and makes things that "kill children". According to the letter, EDO dealt "only with reputable clients" and was "minded to commence proceedings against you for libel, seeking an injunction, damages and costs".

So who are EDO's "reputable clients"? They include Raytheon for whom EDO makes components for the Paveway guided missile system, used by US forces in Iraq in their misguided and ineffective attempts to take out individual Iraqi leaders using laser-guided bombs. According to Human Rights Watch: "The United States used an unsound targeting methodology largely reliant on imprecise coordinates obtained from satellite phones. Leadership targeting was consistently based on unreliable intelligence. It is also likely that Iraqi leaders engaged in successful deception techniques. This combination of factors led directly to dozens of civilian casualties."

Indymedia refused to remove the offending remarks from the internet and EDO has not pursued its claim.

EDO corporation
GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY REACH

It has, however, tried to stop protest outside its factory gates. Last month it asked the courts to use anti-stalking laws to rule that peace protesters can only protest for two and a half hushed hours on a Thursday.

Campaign groups Bombs out of Brighton and Smash EDO were summonsed to the high court to face an application under the protection from harassment act 1997. The injunction would restrict protesters to Thursday afternoons, providing there were of fewer than ten of them and they didn't make any "artificial or musical noise". Anyone singing at the factory gate could face up to five years in prison.

While a full trial is pending, Mr Justice Gross made a temporary order that protesters should stay 50m from the factory premises, but he refused to make any orders over noise, timing or numbers.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Duke of hazard

BRITISH Energy Ltd, the nuclear power generator, has a new chief executive following the early departure of Mike Alexander after a hugely expensive restructuring earlier this year.

The company has looked no further than its own boardroom for a replacement and appointed non-executive director Bill Coley, whose chief qualification for the top job is to have been president of an American nuclear company, Duke Power, until retiring in 2003.

Coley didn't exactly leave the firm in a blaze of glory. His final months were largely spent dealing with allegations into the company's trading activities. In 2002 an independent auditor, investigating claims from a whistleblower, found that Duke had understated its profits by $124m to prevent regulators imposing price reductions on electricity it supplied to residential customers.

And last year the company was forced to pay $207m to settle an investigation by federal energy regulators into its role in the Californian energy crisis in 2000-2001. With shortages at their worst (thanks to market manipulation, it later emerged), Duke had multiplied its energy prices to make unreasonable profits.

Since privatisation in 1996, British Energy's enthusiasm for the free market has been tempered by its frequent need to be bailed out by taxpayers. However, as the country's biggest energy generator, producing 20 percent of output, and with its own trading arm, the company is in pole position when it comes to influencing energy markets. Who better to run the firm than an expert in playing them?

What a Cleaver-dick

WORKERS at Dounreay, the Scottish nuclear complex, are nervous that their new boss, Sir Anthony Cleaver (pictured below), looks remarkably like their old boss, Sir Anthony Cleaver.

Last summer Cleaver (for it is he) was appointed chairman of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), whose main job is to clean up British Nuclear Fuels' (BNFL) legacy of waste at public expense, leaving BNFL free to float off into profitability.

The NDA also takes over the clean-up at the Atomic Energy Authority's (AEA) Dounreay plant, where staff have bad memories of Sir Anthony. He was previously boss of the AEA in the 1990s when his managers contracted out and privatised much of Dounreay's work. In 1998 a highly critical health and safety executive report said this meant Dounreay's managers were unable to decommission the site (see *Eyes passim*).

Cleaver's enthusiasm for big private firms from the US have added to the worries of Dounreay staff. Contractors are back at the plant with a vengeance, with Bechtel executives poring over the books. Dounreay sources believe they have told the NDA the plant is 40 percent over-manned, suggesting some 500 staff cuts. (Coincidentally Dounreay had to rehire around the same number to satisfy safety regulators after numbers were stripped in Cleaver's previous reign.

With British government support, Lockheed is bidding for British nuclear work. Conveniently, Sir Anthony is on the board of Lockheed UK.

Meanwhile Dounreay staff are not reassured that a report by the Commons education select committee has savaged Cleaver's work on another government project, the disastrous "E University". The supposed online university was launched in 2000; but under Cleaver's chairmanship £55m of public money was wasted and it closed last year after only 900 students enrolled.

The MPs thought bonuses paid to Cleaver "were wholly unacceptable and morally indefensible" and the committee blamed the collapse on the failure of Cleaver and his team to do any proper marketing. Instead of carrying out serious research into recruitment, the E University relied on "anecdotal evidence" gathered by "Cleaver making visits to the Far East" where he happened to have "contacts" and other business interests. Not only did this amateurish attempt to recruit students in Asia fail, it also went against the order from government that Cleaver should build the E University in Britain.

As education minister Kim Howells put it: "Sir Anthony Cleaver and John Beaumont were paid a large amount of money to run that company and they both came trailing clouds of great reputation behind them. One would have thought that that company would have had a grip on those kinds of things…"

Private Eye asked the department of trade if the MPs' report put a cloud over Cleaver's new nuclear role. A DTI spokesman said his "job attributes matched the job description". So that's all right, then.

COUNTRYSIDE PROPERTIES

Off the Cuffe

ACCORDING to *What House* magazine: "Countryside Properties has a knack of gaining planning consent on sensitive sites across the UK."

As recent *Eye* stories have shown, one way this developer attempts to ease planning applications is by playing down the presence of "sensitive" materials on its sites – such as vast quantities of asbestos at a former factory earmarked for hundreds of homes in Rochdale (*Eye* 1129) or unexploded bombs on a proposed flats development in Hackney (*Eye* 1130).

Now further evidence has emerged of Countryside's misleading responses to concerns about asbestos in the Spodden Valley, Rochdale, where it wants to build 650 homes and a children's nursery on the former site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory.

On BBC Radio 4's *You and Yours* programme in January, local campaigners said that tree roots by a public footpath on the site were caked in white and brown asbestos. When asked by interviewer John Waite if the residents were "lying or wrong", Countryside director Ian Simpson claimed: "They are wrong, because it's been capped."

In fact Countryside's partner in the scheme, MMC Developments, knew full well in September 2004 that asbestos was exposed on the site. In a letter, seen by the *Eye,* to Michael Drogan, MMC managing director, MMC's land agent Michael Cuffe wrote: "I enclose a site map indicating where the asbestos has been located: asbestos sheets, asbestos insulation board and asbestos fibres found near tree stumps." Cuffe even asked in the letter: "Could you please advise if MMC are going to report the findings to Rochdale [council]?" Four months later the developers had not admitted the presence of surface asbestos – even Countryside director Ian Simpson apparently didn't know of its existence when interviewed on *You and Yours*.

Another contentious Countryside application is at the secluded and unspoilt hamlet of Slaughterford, near Chippenham, Wiltshire, where residents have been resisting attempts to build nine out-of-character "executive" houses on the site of a former paper mill for nearly a decade. Countryside is currently appealing North Wiltshire district council's rejection of its latest application. The site is on a flood plain and contains a dump for heavy metals and dioxins from the old mill.

In 1999, when Countryside first lodged an application to build there, planning inspectors said: "There is no dispute that the site is contaminated as a result of its previous use first as a fulling mill then as a paper mill." But the inspectors were shocked to discover that no "appraisal or quantitative and qualitative risk assessment" had been undertaken by Countryside. Furthermore: "Dioxins have not been investigated." Not for the first time, Countryside Properties' attitude to contaminants on land they intend to develop was shown to be lax, to say the least.

ASYLUM VOUCHERS

Let them drink coffee...

CURIOUSLY, while the public was distracted by the hysteria whipped up over immigration during the election, without telling anyone home office ministers quietly reintroduced the discredited voucher system for asylum-seekers.

Even David Blunkett (pictured), as a hardline home secretary, said vouchers were "socially divisive" and withdrew them after protests that many asylum-seekers went without food, others couldn't travel and the vouchers could only be spent in a limited number of state-approved shops.

Since 11 April, however, new vouchers have been reintroduced. Although they are not being issued to all asylum-seekers, they are being given to what are known as S4 claimants under the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). These include thousands of Iraqis whose asylum claims have failed but who cannot be returned to their country because, er, it's far too dangerous.

Many of these people will have to live on the £35-a-week vouchers for months if not years. Arguably the new vouchers are even worse than the ones abolished by Blunkett because they are only for food. Citizens' Advice Bureaux and refugee agencies around the country are already struggling to help. Mothers are unable to buy nappies, baby milk, wipes or essential sanitary items; one man who had all his belongings stolen from his hostel could not buy any new clothes; and asylum-seekers are missing some vital appointments because they have no money for bus or train fares.

The number and range of shops that accept the new vouchers is very limited, but includes an array of pricey coffee and sandwich chains like Starbucks, Café Uno, Café Republic, Pret a Manger and Benjys.

In places like Hull, however, it's not even a case of "let them drink coffee". Of the 23 listed retailers accepting vouchers, no fewer than 11 have no outlets at all, while two others are pubs. The three supermarkets that can take the vouchers, Asda, Sainsbury and Tesco, are on the edge of town which, if you can't pay a bus fare, is hopeless.

So the campaign to abolish vouchers, which most people conceded robbed asylum-seekers of their dignity and ability to manage their lives, starts all over again. But why the ministers' reluctance to crow about their "get tough" stance? Surely not because the NASS doesn't even have a contract with the private contractor to whom it is handing millions of public money to run the voucher and accommodation schemes?

Get it taped

ASYLUM-SEEKERS have secured a victory at the royal courts of justice that is causing havoc at the home office and the asylum and immigration tribunal (AIT).

Following a ruling last month, the home office must now provide tape recordings of interviews with asylum-seekers to ensure there is a fair and accurate account of the meeting. Asylum-seekers have long argued that notes taken by immigration officials do not always accurately record what is said. Judges ruled that in the absence of legal representation, the only way to ensure fairness was to provide police interview-type tapes for those who request them.

Thus the home office is rushing out to buy specialist dual tape recording machines and provide facilities and staff to use them. No doubt envisaging disputes and delays caused by the examination of tapes and transcripts, the head of the AIT, Judge Henry Hodge (husband of Labour's blessed Margaret) groaned and asked: "Whose the judgment by? Anyone I can ignore?"

Unfortunately for Henry, the answer is no. The court of appeal ruling came from judges including Lord Phillips, master of the rolls, no less.

FURTHER EDUCATION NEWS

Fear and Lothian

WHEN a PFI contract was signed in 1999, it was hailed by ministers as "excellent news for the development of West Lothian". Now West Lothian College is £4.3m in debt and will soon be unable to meet its contractual obligations under the deal.

West Lothian was the second further education PFI in the UK, after Falkirk College. It was agreed in 1999 by the Scottish Office, then in charge of further education in Scotland. A brand new campus was built in Livingston with "futuristic" study facilities. But almost as soon as it was finished in 2001, the college had to make staff cuts and turn away students because of money problems.

In 2003 the college was already struggling to meet the bills, and the new college principal, Sue Pinder, described the contract as a "pig's arse" which would ultimately cost £52m – and at the end of 25 years the college still wouldn't own its own buildings!

At present the college pays £1.1m a year for "facilities management" to the PFI consortium that built the £18m buildings. The remainder of the bill is paid by the Scottish Further Education Funding Council which contributed £2.8m last year. From 2007 the SFEFC contribution was due to reduce significantly, leaving the college to pick up the tab itself.

However, a report by the Scottish auditor-general Robert Black has concluded that "without a significant increase in other funding the college will be unable to meet its contractual commitments".

There are only so many cost-cutting measures the college can make and it cannot be allowed to go bust. So yet another expensive bail-out from public funds is on the cards.

Lancaster bummer

IT SEEMS the University of Wales isn't alone in heavy handedly employing Inspector Knacker to stifle free speech (see *Eye* 1130) as our supposed refuges of academic freedom are forced to cosy up to big business for funding.

Six students from Lancaster University are facing charges of aggravated trespass for taking part in a demonstration on their own campus. They were protesting against a "corporate venturing" conference organized by the university, which had speakers from BAE Systems, Shell and other companies which the students felt had records of environmental or human rights abuses.

After demonstrating outside the George Fox building, they took their protest inside the lecture theatre until they were removed by university security staff. They then continued their peaceful protest outside.

The students maintain that when police were called, officers told them at the time that they were not committing any offence. But last month – five months after the protest and to the students' utter disbelief – they received summonses to appear in court in September for alleged aggravated trespass, charges that can only have been instigated by the university.

Local Green councillors have written to Lancaster's vice-chancellor, Prof Paul Wellings, urging him to drop the case and asking him what he thinks education is for if not to encourage people to express opinions.

So far there is no sign Lancaster is relenting. The students' only hope is that magistrates at least recognise what a waste of taxpayers' money it is to try to stifle debate and protest through the police and courts.

In the City

RUSSIAN oil oligarch Roman Abramovich has so far spent up to a staggering £427m to buy the Premiership title for Chelsea. Most of that investment has been made by way of unsecured and interest-free loans. The rest has been invested through the purchase of shares in the soccer club and its private parent company.

These amazing facts about just how much the ever tie-less tycoon has poured into the club since he bought it almost two years ago are disclosed in the recently filed first accounts for Chelsea Limited, the company the billionaire used to buy the then listed Chelsea Village. Chelsea Limited is owned by Abramovich in his own name, although initially it was said to have been owned via offshore companies in Cyprus and the British Virgin Islands – both tax havens beloved by Russians.

Abramovich paid £60.7m cash for Chelsea Village which was teetering on the edge of a financial crisis with debts of £177m. He paid some £5m more than the group's net asset value. For that he received players valued at £100m and properties, mainly the Stamford Bridge complex, worth £152m.

"Jill, what time is my wife's funeral?"

Since July 2003 Abramovich has paid off most of the debts, including more than half the £75m Eurobond due for redemption in 2007. He spent, according to the Chelsea Limited accounts, no less than £175m on players in the first year to June 2004, the end of the previous Premiership season. And since then, during the current championship season, he has added at least a further £82m on players making a total of £257m. No wonder chief executive Peter Kenyon maintains that the big spending days are over. But that was before the failure to win in Europe.

Just how has this record-breaking spending spree been financed? Apart from the income from the club, which in 2004 just covered the £116m players' wage bill, and the sale of players – mostly out of Abramovich's personal resources, it would seem. Although the money flows into Chelsea Limited are opaque.

In addition to the £60.7m purchase price, Chelsea Limited had invested £276m in Chelsea Village, now renamed Chelsea FC (£161m in shares and another £115m in loans) by last June, plus another £82m on new players since. Where has that money come from? Well, no less than £224m a year ago was in the form of an interest-free loan which was originally repayable on demand! But perhaps more realistically, since June last year this has been changed to provide for 18 months' notice of a demand to be repaid.

Just where this money has come from is completely unclear, as the benevolent lender has taken no charge over the Chelsea assets. Unlike the Bank of Ireland which has advanced money to the company secured on a £4.5m deposit. Abramovich personally is not identified as the source of the finance, which is said to be an unnamed "funding company" that has assured Chelsea's sole director, his close associate Eugene Tenenbaum, that "sufficient funds will be made available to allow the company to continue trading for the foreseeable future".

The likelihood is that the money has come from one of Abramovich's offshore pockets, filled up over the years from Sibneft oil and share sales and dividends, not to mention the recent sale of his other Russian assets such as a half-interest in the aluminium giant Rusal.

What is clear is that Abramovich himself invested no less than £60m in new Chelsea Limited shares in June last year. Why, therefore, should he be so coy about the source of the £224m? Perhaps because of critics in Russia who see him and Sibneft as possible targets for large tax bills and who look increasingly unkindly upon those Russian oligarchs who have exported their capital. There is also the circling European Bank for Reconstruction & Development which claims Abramovich owes $17.5m for an unpaid loan – something he denies.

Just how much of this biggest ever single investment in British soccer Abramovich could hope to get back should he lose interest in Chelsea is debatable. Chelsea Limited and its subsidiaries, including the club, had net liabilities of £18m at June 2004 with £400m owed to creditors and net current liabilities of £308m.

Chelsea FC, the former Chelsea Village which actually owns the club, lost £30m, a figure that soared to £88m when player trading was included, on turnover of £152m. That compares with the £27m loss reported for the last year under former chairman Ken Bates. The loss at the higher Chelsea Limited level was even higher – £93m. No wonder Peter Kenyon says that his plan is to make Chelsea self-financing within five years. Even Abramovich needs to close his cheque book at some time. Easier said than done after so much cash has been pumped in, interest- and dividend-free.

But that was then and this is now, with Chelsea coming to the end of its best season for 50 years. How much better those finances will look for June 2005 given the continued spending is a moot point. As is how Abramovich would ever make the greater fool theory work and find someone to repay that £427m and counting, either through a takeover bid or by selling shares into a flotation.

It is worth remembering that Manchester United, arguably a bigger and more established brand than Chelsea, is currently valued at £800m by would-be buyer Malcolm Glazer. Abramovich must hope that Chelsea does not become a one championship wonder like Jack Walker's Blackburn – the last club to buy the Premiership with a rich fan's cheque book. Walker's family were stuck with his far more modest investment.

UNTIL Abramovich came along the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed was the record holder for the fan with the biggest cheque book. But unlike Jack and Roman, Momo has no Premiership title to show for the £107m he has so far pumped into Chelsea's near neighbour, Fulham.

For 2004 Fulham made the first profit since Fayed bought the then second division club in 1997, since when the group losses have reached £121m. That profit was thanks to the £12.8m sale of Louis Saha to Manchester United and a cut in the players' wage bill from £36m to £30m which helped turn a near £9m loss into a £508,000 profit. For 2003 the loss was £21m.

Fayed finances Fulham from the BVI through Fulham Leisure Holdings which has loaned the club £107m interest-free – an increase from £91m in 2003. All but £6.7m is not repayable before 2008. Although exactly how Fulham like Chelsea would repay absent a bid is far from certain.

The Fulham Stadium subsidiary of Fulham Football Leisure, the UK company which owns the club and its Craven Cottage ground, has also borrowed £8m on more commercial terms from the Irish Nationwide Building Society in Dublin, but this is due for repayment by 2006. This money, plus inter-Fayed company loans, was used to repay the £15m deposit put down in 2002 on the purchase of the Craven Cottage ground by an unknown developer. That deal fell through when the cost of a replacement stadium soared, no suitable alternative site could be found and planning permission looked unlikely for anything other than what has now happened – a refurbished Craven Cottage said to have cost more than £8m. That effective £15m loan was repaid in June last year plus interest charges of £3.2m. Also repaid last year was a loan from the Football Association for £3.5m. As at Harrods, Fayed still needs support from the banks.

Fayed is assumed to fund Fulham from the dividends paid offshore by Harrods. But interestingly it would appear that during 2004 for once Fulham was lending Fayed money, as Fulham Football Leisure received £112,000 in interest from its BVI parent. Why and how? Only the pharaoh knows.

By last June Fulham Football Leisure had net debt of £118m. That figure is likely to have grown after a poor season in which Fulham narrowly escaped relegation. Fayed has to hope that the club can keep repeating the trick if he is ever to see any of that money.

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

MEGACARE MEDICAL
THE TORIES WANTED INDIVIDUALS TO BUY PRIVATE HEALTHCARE...
...BUT NOW THAT BLAIR IS BACK IN...
...THE ENTIRE NHS WILL BUY PRIVATE HEALTHCARE!
LABOUR 5 MORE YEARS!
193

WHY Thatcherite Labour supporter Sir Alan Sugar should be treated as a business icon because he can fire greedy wannabes on a TV reality show is yet further evidence of how short is the City folk memory.

The star of *The Apprentice*, like Donald Trump, his predecessor on the American original who had problems only last year requiring his casino business to seek bankruptcy protection from creditors, has himself often been less than a hero to Amstrad shareholders who were on occasion tempted to tell him "You're fired."

Sugar floated Amstrad in 1980 with a market value of £8m. Come 1988 the consumer electronics group was worth £1.3bn. But by the end of 1989 the shares had crashed after trading setbacks and the stock market price tag was just £244m.

The company and shares partly recovered in 1990; but then Sugar did not win many friends in 1991 when he unloaded shares worth £34m at 80p to buy into Tottenham Hotspur. Two profit warnings and three months later the shares were 54p.

Then in 1992 Sugar tried to buy back the 65 percent of the company he did not control for 30p a share, or £113m. "I am your receiver, I am your liquidator," he cheerfully told angry shareholders. He criticised his own management admitting the company had lost momentum and had no new "blockbuster" big ideas. Sugar warned the company would "never be profitable enough to push the share price back up to £1". His manoeuvre was rejected by institutional and private investors who believed it was a bid to buy them out on the cheap.

And so it proved. Within a year, profits had recovered and the shares were over 50p. Then came another profit warning and the price headed south once more. It was not until 1998 that the shares performed again. Subsequently the share price went up to 350p five years ago, before collapsing back down to below 50p in 2003. Since then it has recovered but still under-performed and is now around 135p after being 227p last July. Sugar may be a TV favourite but he has few fans in the City. They have little wish to follow the wannabes into Sugarland.

But then the Amstrad boss has never had much time for scribblers of any kind and cheerfully denies any interest in the Amstrad share price, despite still being the largest shareholder.

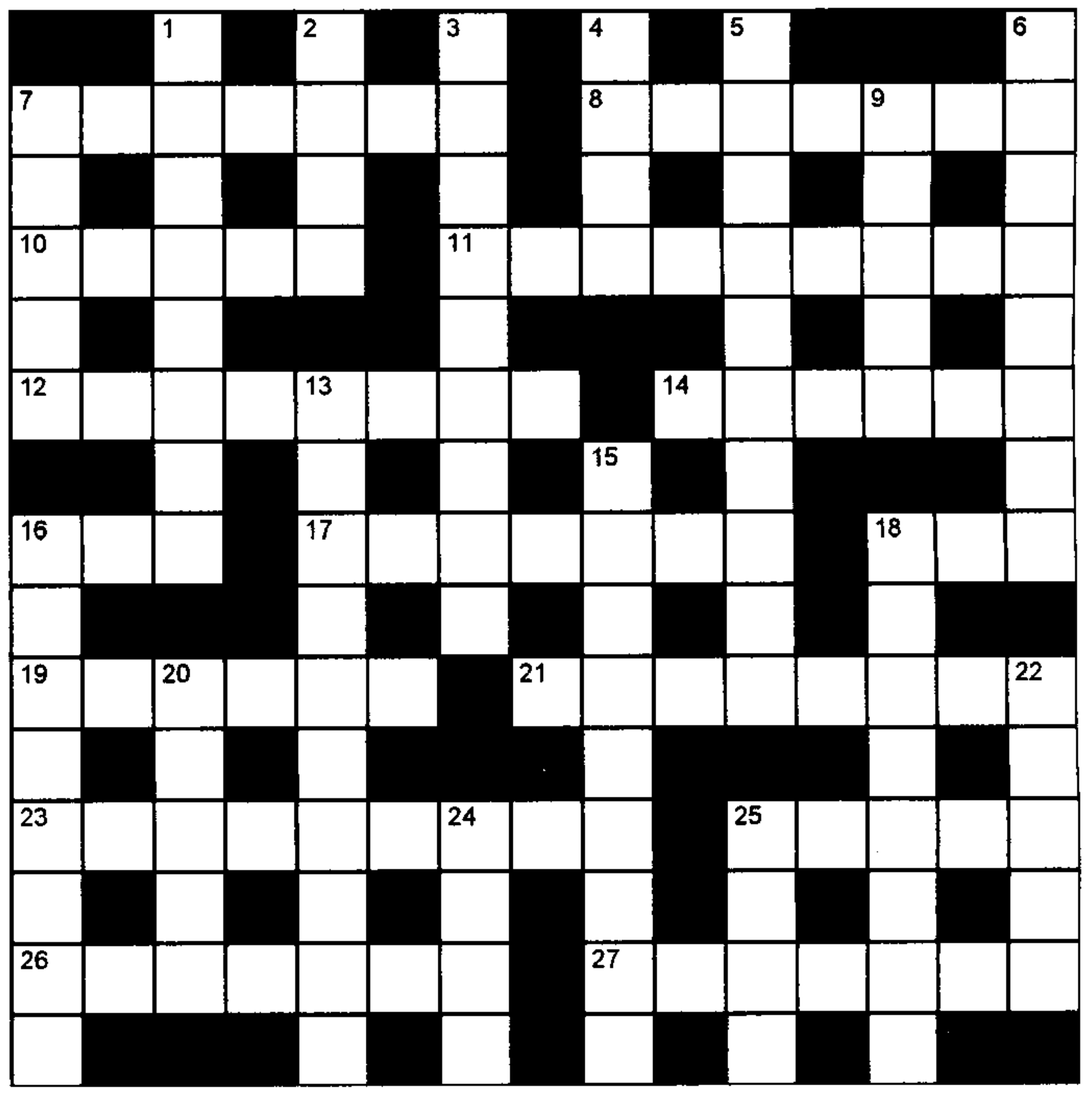
NIGERIAN scam artists are nothing if not imaginative. Not content with plugging into the latest disaster – Asian tsunami/Darfur – to generate "open your wallet and say after me" letters to greedy victims, they have now seen a belated opportunity following the death in 2003 of Sir Denis Thatcher.

Perhaps inspired by the boy Mark's farcical venture in neighbouring Equatorial Guinea, two eminent but no doubt imaginary Reverends write informing the email recipient they are the welcome if surprise beneficiary of $750,000 from the Thatcher estate "to support your Christian activities and to help the poor and less privileged in your country". Whatever would the Boss think of such a waste? All that is required to start cashing in – them, not you – is your fax, telephone, address and bank details.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 287

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 20 May 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

7 City dweller's arse holding in runs (electric current inserted in Cyclops) (7)
8 See 16ac.
10 General Election losers dropping half of colleagues (5)
11 Free Willy and everything and do this in the pool? (6-3)
12 See 16ac,
14 Wilted having quiet "J. Arthur"? (6)
16/8/12/18 Hardly the best worded demand for habitual wanker to show restraint (3,1,4,2,8,3)
17 He scored with Diana, Dodi, finally – twice, around noon (7)
18 See 16ac.
19 Travelling Virgin? Getting screwed? Ring for one (6)
21 Scuds are deployed – Jerusalem one of their objectives (8)
23 Hint: he's broken by sex and likely to get a bollocking? (2,3,4)
25 Beat heartless lover-boy (5)
26 Jack Kennedy's first with Brenda, then round bend with Bill (7)
27 Could well be unstable at core, right? (7)

DOWN

1 One-piece wear for shag clubs maybe? (4,4)
2 Writer wrong to get end away (4)
3 *Virgin Airlines Finally Meets Gordon*, an intrusion on viewers (9)
4 Skirt Hastings, Cyclops! (4)
5 Smacker setting tongues wagging (6,4)
6 Implied one's plastered with spunk (8)
7/25dn. Beware of this tit leading uprising of Conservatives possibly (5,4)
9 First sightings of piss artist Dido under arrest in Italian town (5)
13 This brigade likes them well hung (6,2,2)
15 Visitors missing curtailed sexual intercourse without underwear and sex aids (9)
16 Right to use tongue when held by homosexual having pungent breath? (8)
18 Fashion judge is not how you'd describe Sharon (8)
20 The Vicar, half Tory on the inside, upset one who deserted him (5)
22 Not pissed off, Boers (5)
24 Pisspoor columnist taking refuge in Murdoch acknowledgements? (4)
25 See 7dn.

Crossword 286 winner: JOHN BARTLETT

ACROSS: 7 Ballrooms 9 Rambo 10 Creep 11 Lecherous 12/21 Election promises 13 Maniac 16 Constipated 20 Relate 24 Flashbulb 26 Scrub 27 Model 28 Fan dancer.

DOWN: 1 Blue-pencil 2 Armpit 3 Poll booth 4 Artefact 5 Ammo 6 Cossack 7 Becket 8 Sick 14 In disgrace 15 Sperm bank 17 Nutshell 18 Profumo 19 Isobar 22 Mossad 23 Puff 25 Andy.

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I know and I've never seen him before either

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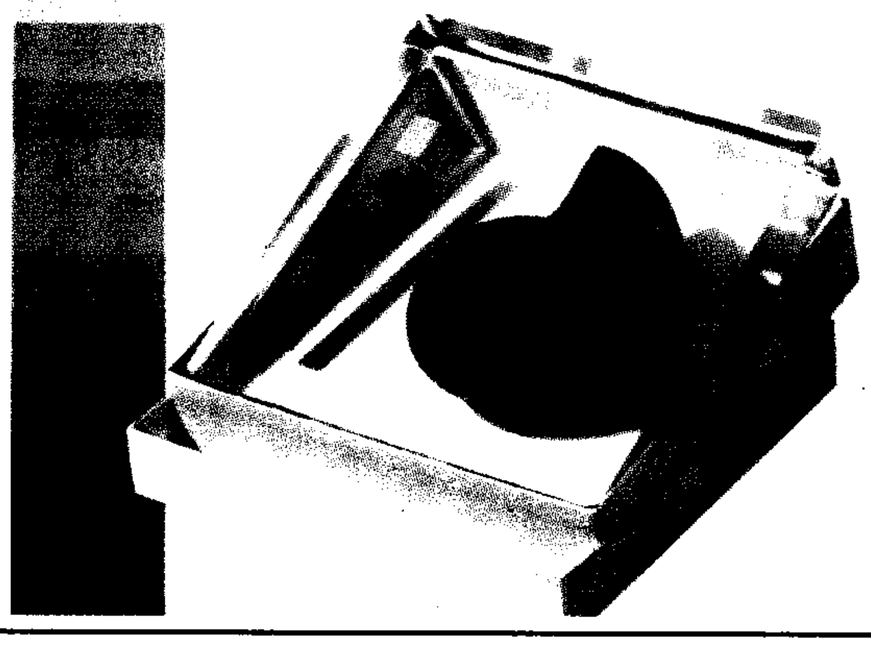

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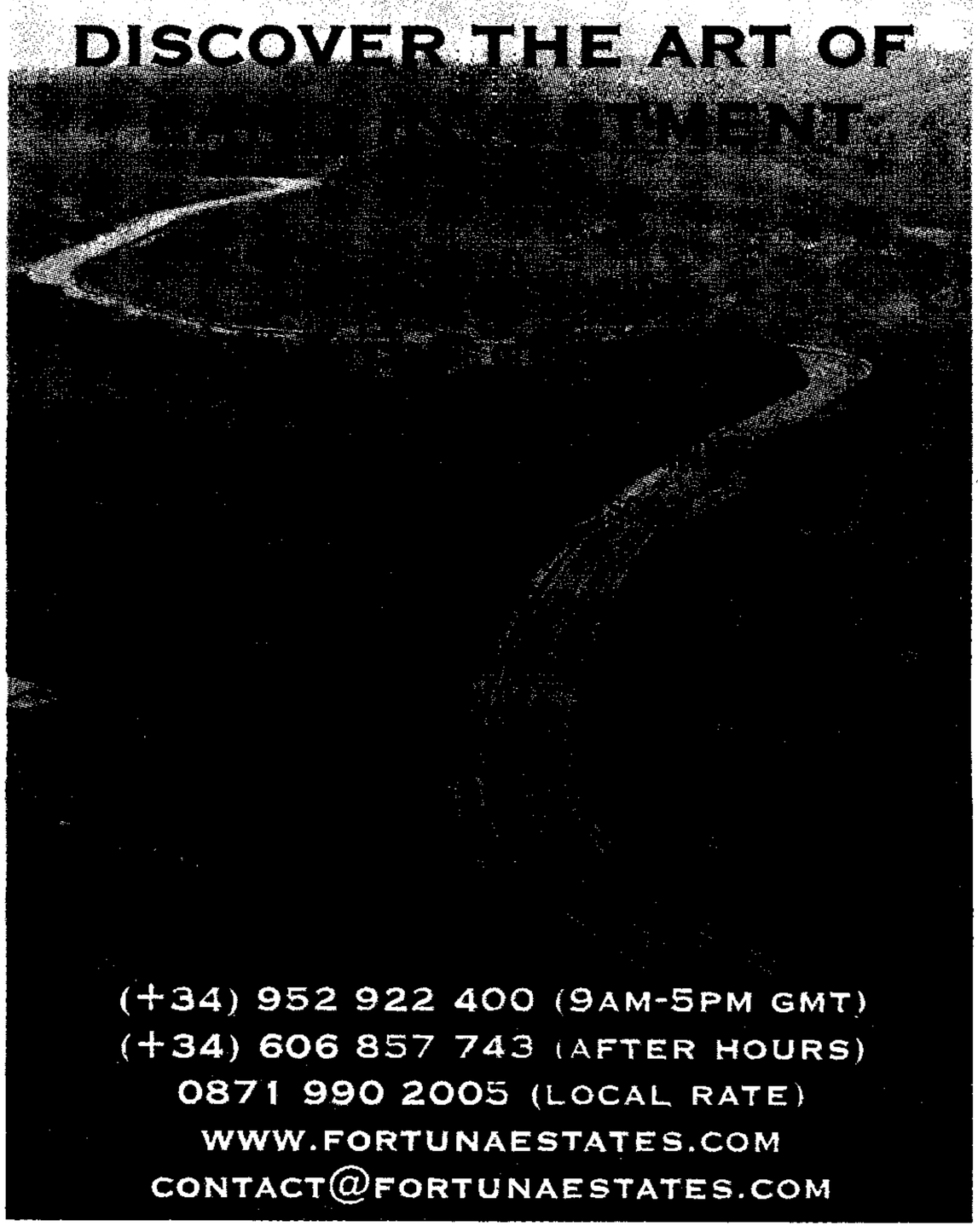

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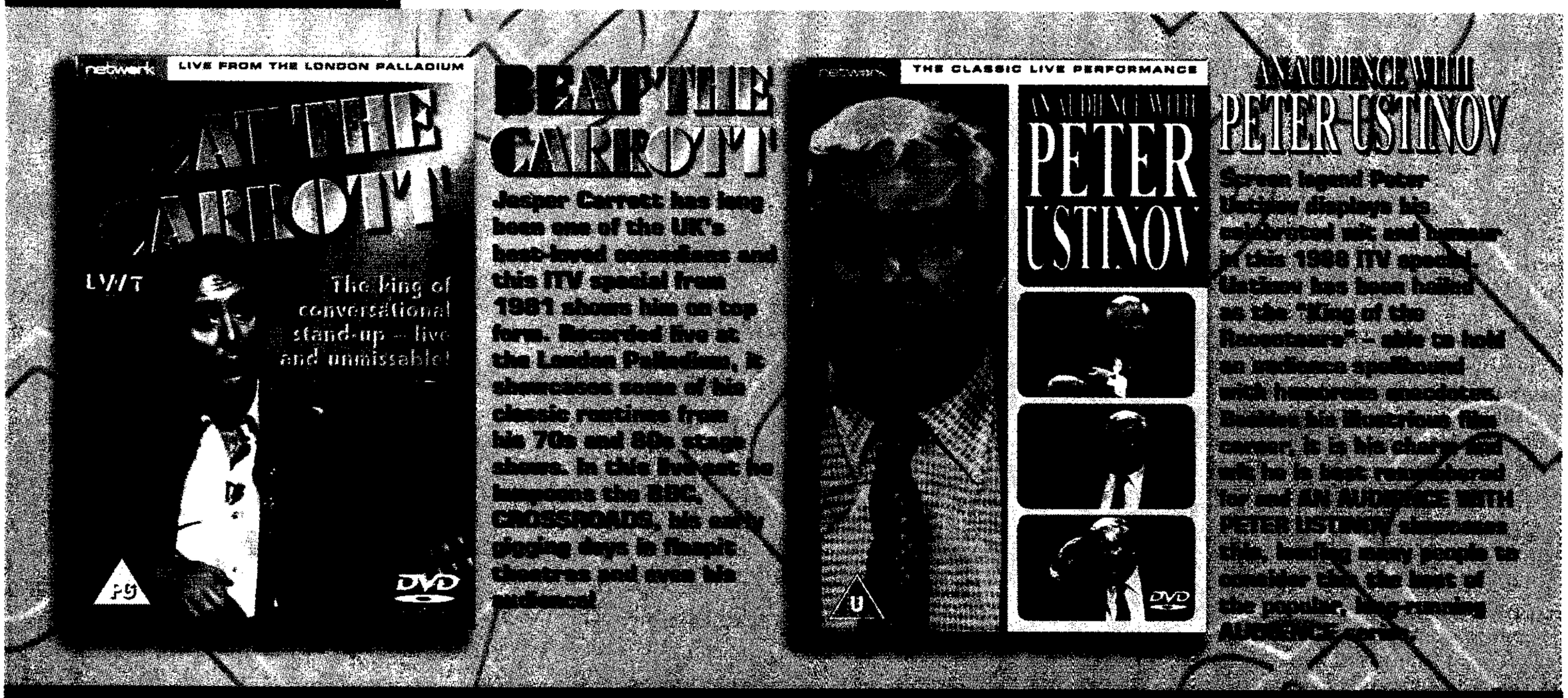
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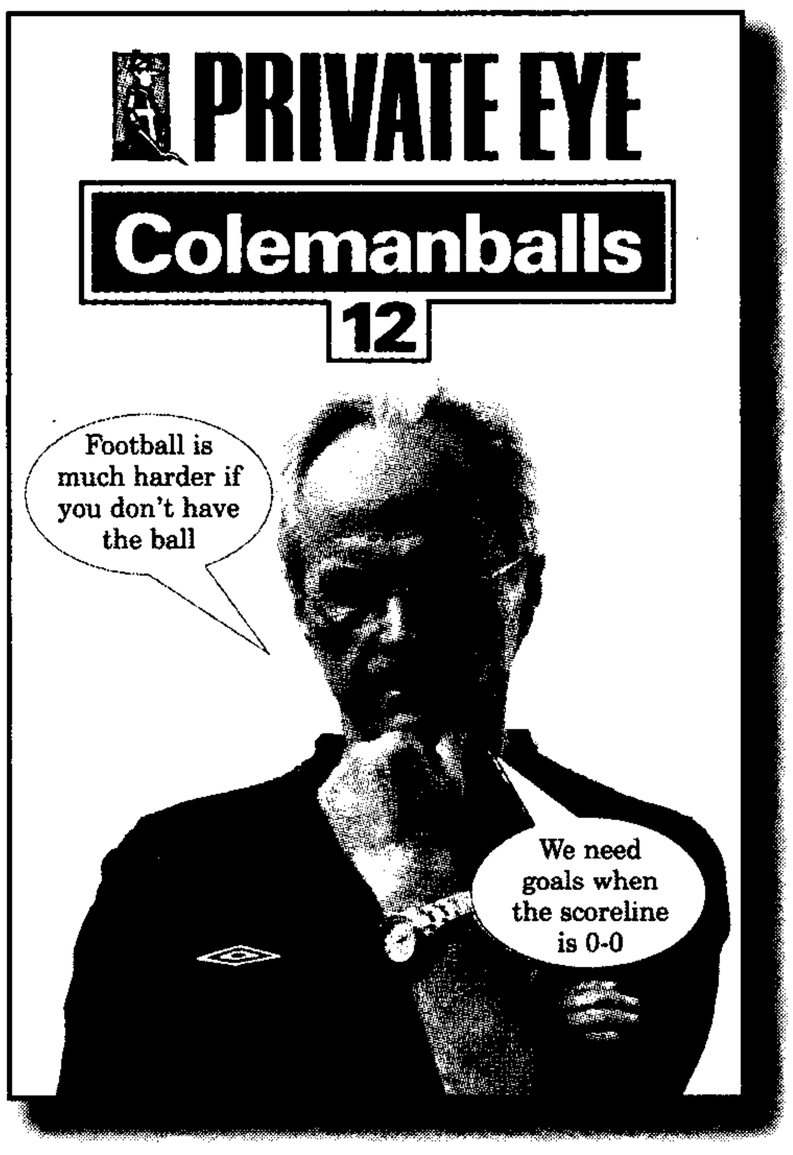

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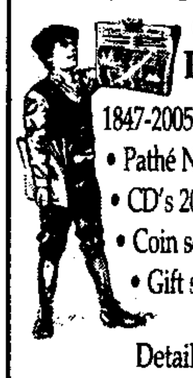

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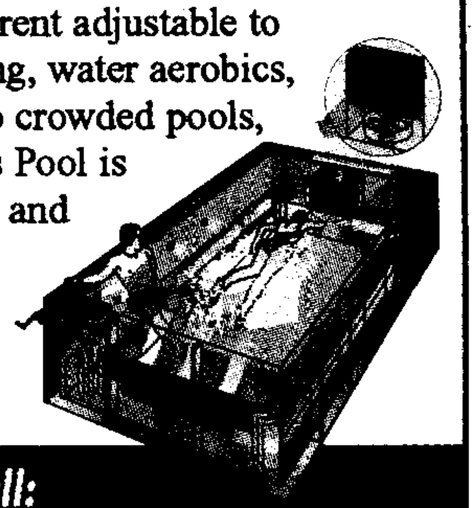

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The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that - a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up - he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

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Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

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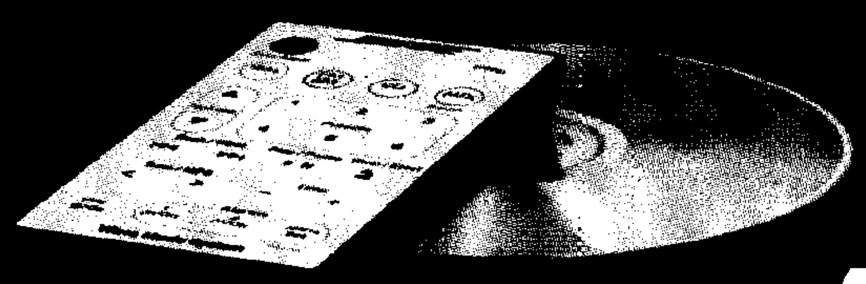

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